

Sight & Sound

The Film Monthly

June

1/6



Cannes Festival

Judy Garland

Critics and the Box-Office

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KEN TYNAN

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by
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CONTENTS

FILM GUIDE

The Front Page—

MOVIE CRAZY

Ken Tynan

THE SEVENTH ART

LONDON 1951

CANNES FESTIVAL

Gavin Lambert

THE CASE OF DE SICA

John Maddison

THE CRITICS AND THE BOX-OFFICE

Leonard England

Films of the Month—

ACE IN THE HOLE

Penelope Houston

DAVID

Gavin Lambert

LA RONDE

Richard Winnington

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A FILM

ACTING

Philip Hope-Wallace

STAR TURN: *Judy Garland*

UNFAIR TO EISENSTEIN?

Marie Seton, Karel Reisz,

Lewis McLeod

SOVIET CINEMA'S CHANGE OF HEART

H. H. Wollenberg

INDEPENDENCE

REPORT ON ZONK

Norman F. Spurr

BOOK REVIEWS

Duncan Crow, Alan Brien

TELEVISION

Ernest Lindgren

CORRESPONDENCE AND COMPETITION

ON THE COVER: *Judy Garland* (see page 52) in *The Harvey Girls*

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SIGHT AND SOUND'S GUIDE TO CURRENT FILMS

Brief Pointers to the principal films showing in British cinemas during June. Last-minute changes of programme after our press-date may cause one or two inaccuracies (chiefly in the London area) but we hope this list may serve as a useful general guide. Films with an asterisk are particularly recommended.

BALLERINA (*Concorde*). The romance of a tenor and a young dancer, overshadowed by some trouble with the Party, but ending happily. Indifferent Soviet comedy, with some tantalising glimpses of Ulanova. (Mira Redina, Victor Kozanovitch; director, Alexander Ivanovsky.)

BORN YESTERDAY (*Columbia*). Judy Holliday brilliant in quite entertaining transcription of Garson Kanin's play about the democratic education of a dumb blonde. (Broderick Crawford, William Holden; director, George Cukor.)

CALL ME MISTER (*Fox*). Betty Grable musical, based on Broadway revue, about troop entertainers in Japan after the war. Quite agreeable. (Dan Dailey; director, Lloyd Bacon.)

CAPTAIN HORATIO HORNBLOWER, R.N. (*Warners*). The adventures of C. S. Forester's famous hero pursued at considerable length; naval battles, Technicolor, simple spectacle. (Gregory Peck, Virginia Mayo, Robert Beatty; director, Raoul Walsh.)

CIRCLE OF DANGER (*R.K.O.*). An American visits various areas of Great Britain while investigating his brother's mysterious wartime death. Slow-moving thriller. (Ray Milland, Patricia Roc; director, Jacques Tourneur.)

CLOCHEMERLE (*United Artists*). Energetic but rather indifferent French comedy of village life. (Felix Oudart, Brochard; director, Pierre Chenal.)

COMPANY SHE KEEPS, *The* (*R.K.O.*). Parole officer Lizabeth Scott reforms criminal Jane Greer by the self-sacrificing surrender of her fiancé: novelettish story, adequate treatment. (Dennis O'Keefe; director, John Cromwell.)

CUPBOARD WAS BARE, *The* (*L'ARMOIRE VOLANTE*) (*Films de France*). Fernandel comedy about a tax collector's pursuit of a cupboard containing his aunt's dead body. Mildly entertaining. (Director, Carlo Rim.)

***DROLE DE DRAME** (*Film Traders*). Marcel Carné's second film (1937), scripted by Prévert; a delightful and inconsequent burlesque of Edwardian England, with Scotland Yard unravelling a preposterous murder mystery. (Michel Simon, Louis Jouvet, Françoise Rosay, Jean-Louis Barrault.)

FATHER'S LITTLE DIVIDEND (*M.G.M.*). Sequel to *Father of the Bride*: Spencer Tracy resigns himself reluctantly to becoming a grandfather. Thin material, excessive sentiment, accomplished performances from Tracy and Joan Bennett. (Elizabeth Taylor; director, Vincente Minnelli.)

FOLLOW THE SUN (*Fox*). Idealised biography of American champion golfer Ben Hogan: scenes on the golf course interspersed with sentimentally handled family life. Competent. (Glenn Ford, Anne Baxter; director, Sidney Lanfield.)

GALLOPING MAJOR, *The* (*Independent/British Lion*). Comedy about the acquisition of a racehorse by the inhabitants of a London suburb. Pleasant theme, but uninventive treatment. (Basil Radford, Janette Scott, Jimmy Hanley; director, Henry Cornelius.)

GREAT CARUSO, *The* (*M.G.M.*). Film biography reduced to a dreary romantic formula, with Mario Lanza bringing distinction to the sound track. (Ann Blyth; director, Richard Thorpe.)

HAPPY GO LOVELY (*A.B.-Pathe*). Routine backstage musical, set in Edinburgh during the Festival, with some ambitiously mounted but uninspired numbers. (Vera-Ellen, David Niven; director, Bruce Humberstone.)

HOUSE ON TELEGRAPH HILL, *The* (*Fox*). Melodrama, set in San Francisco, about a woman whose husband tries to murder her for money. Conventional plot and atmosphere, adequately done rather after the Hitchcock manner. (Valentina Cortese, Richard Basehart, William Lundigan; director, Robert Wise.)

JENNIE (*British Lion*). Young artist falls in love with ghost of dead girl, paints her portrait and makes his name. Pretentious and whimsical dialogue; full of technical tricks and cosmic references. (Joseph Cotten, Jennifer Jones, Ethel Barrymore; director, William Dieterle.)

LATE EDWINA BLACK, *The* (*British Lion*). Victorian thriller adapted from a *Gaslight* style stage play. Competent. (David Farrar, Geraldine Fitzgerald; director, Maurice Elvey.)

MACBETH (*Republic*). Orson Welles' hectic adaptation is unfair to Shakespeare. Some clever effects brighten up the crudities and bad acting. (Welles, Jeannette Nolan, Dan O'Herlihy.)

NEXT VOICE YOU HEAR, *The* (*M.G.M.*). A small-town American family reacts to the voice of God: described with care and complacent piety. (James Whitmore, Nancy Davis; director, William Wellman.)

ONE WILD OAT (*Eros*). Screen version of stage farce; simple humour preserved. (Robertson Hare, Stanley Holloway; director, Charles Saunders.)

OUT OF TRUE (*Regent Films*). A rather tentative British answer to *The Snake Pit*: wife who has a nervous breakdown is cured at a pleasant hospital. (Jane Hylton, Muriel Pavlow; director, Philip Leacock.)

PAYMENT ON DEMAND (*R.K.O.*). Slick magazine-type story about an ambitious woman who drives her husband to getting a divorce and then decides she wants him after all. Very glossy, with a stylish performance from Bette Davis. (Barry Sullivan; director, Curtis Bernhardt.)

***RONDE**, *La* (*G.C.T.*). Love's continuous cycle, followed through a series of adulterous intrigues in 1900 Vienna: elegant, witty, sometimes bitter comedy, handled with characteristic virtuosity by Max Ophüls. (Walbrook, Simone Simon, Reggiani, Barrault, Darrieux, Signoret, Philipe, Daniel Gelin, Gerard Philipe, Isa Miranda, Odette Joyeux.)

ROSEANNA MCCOY (*R.K.O.*). Saucy *Saturday Evening Post*-style period melodrama: passionate backwoods lovers resolve ancient feud between their respective families. (Farley Granger, Joan Evans, Richard Basehart; director, Irving Reis.)

SCARF, *The* (*United Artists*). Dupont, director of the famous *Variety*, comes back with a weird little melodrama, psychotically trimmed. (John Ireland, Mercedes McCambridge, Emlyn Williams.)

SOLDIERS THREE (*M.G.M.*). Old-fashioned army frolic, based on Kipling. (Stewart Granger, Robert Newton, Walter Pidgeon, David Niven; director, Tay Garnett.)

TALE OF FIVE CITIES, *A* (*Grand National*). Soldier suffering from loss of memory visits five European cities in hope of discovering his past; trivial treatment of an idea that deserved better. (Bonar Colleano, Lana Morris, Barbara Kelly; director, Montgomery Tully.)

TALES OF HOFFMANN (*British Lion*). A Powell-Pressburger experiment in simultaneous opera and ballet: a few fine effects, but a misfire. (Moirá Shearer, Robert Helpmann, Frederick Ashton.)

***TERESA** (*M.G.M.*). Fred Zinnemann's new film is a sensitive, absorbing, sometimes touching story about an emotionally adolescent G.I. who marries an Italian girl, and his mother's attempts to wreck the marriage. The solution, though, is artificially done. (John Ericson, Pier Angeli, Patricia Collinge.)

TOM BROWN'S SCHOOLDAYS (*Renown*). New screen version of famous novel: bullying, sentiment, the reforms of Dr. Arnold, some boisterous schoolboy scenes, all quite competently if unadventurously done. (Robert Newton, John Howard Davies; director, Gordon Parry.)

WHERE THE SIDEWALK ENDS (*Fox*). Thriller, scripted by Ben Hecht, about a tough policeman who attempts to cover up his own crime but is finally regenerated. Average. (Dana Andrews, Gene Tierney, director, Otto Preminger.)

WONDER MAN (*R.K.O.*). Reissue of amusing Danny Kaye comedy in which he appears as two brothers, student and night club entertainer. (Virginia Mayo; director, Bruce Humberstone.)

YOU'RE IN THE NAVY NOW (*Fox*). Leisurely, quite pleasant comedy about an inexperienced crew and captain assigned to an experimental naval craft. (Gary Cooper, Jane Greer; director, Henry Hathaway.)

The Front Page

Time for Experiment

WITH THE TELECINEMA PROGRAMMES on the South Bank, experiment is already in the air; two of the films—the Pathé Documentary Unit's tour of the Zoo and Brian Smith's *Royal River*—are designed simply to show the visual impact of stereoscopic cinema, in black-and-white and colour respectively, which they do admirably. The other two, however, by Norman MacLaren, with stereophonic music by Lou Applebaum, offer the fascinating spectacle of an artist experimenting decoratively in space. It is still premature to discuss the dramatic possibilities of the third dimension—examples are necessary, and the novelty value must wear off first—but MacLaren's films make one thing clear: stereoscopy gives both a literal and imaginative extension in depth to the abstract artist, and it is conceivable that abstract art will receive a new lease of life (which it sorely needs) in this medium.

It is, however, the long term commercial prospects of stereoscopy and stereophony which are likely to arouse the widest general interest. The reaction of the trade press to stereoscopy is certainly favourable in principle, the possibilities being welcomed with some enthusiasm. The main reservations are concerned with practical application, particularly the cost of fitting the equipment into existing cinemas, if these can be adapted, and the need to wear polarised glasses, which is regarded as a handicap. These problems, however, can no doubt be solved, and the trade response suggests that the technique is regarded as more than an interesting novelty. Stereophonic sound, however, is generally dismissed as just that—a trick of little significance.

Meanwhile, restricting themselves to two dimensions, but attempting many other experimental devices, a group of film-makers based on Oxford are now planning an ambitious ballet film on 16 mm. It will be shot in colour from a treatment by a talented young American artist, Sam Kaner, living in Oxford. His paintings and three-colour engravings have had a very successful exhibition recently in Oxford, and are to be shown in London and Paris. He has conceived a ballet especially for the cinema, in which colour, décor, human figures and camera effects will all play equal and vital parts. The film will be directed by Guy L. Coté, who wrote, produced and directed *Sestrières* 1949, an outstanding recent amateur film, which will be noticed in SIGHT AND SOUND next month. It is intended to start shooting towards the end of July: the unit is now engaged in collecting equipment and finding sponsors. The British Film Institute, the Federation of Film Societies and several individual film societies have already promised support.

An international flavour is evident throughout the scheme. The originator is American, the director French-Canadian: the cameraman will be English—Michael Warne, who photographed most of *Sestrières*—and also the choreographer, Walter Gore: the main dancer will be Swedish, Tutte Lemkow, recently at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, in "The Battle of Tancredi and Clorinda", and his partner in this, Sara Luzita, will also dance in the film: a Japanese-American artist in Paris, Tajiri, is making mobiles for the décor. The producer is Derick Knight who, with Coté, is the leading spirit of the Oxford Experimental Film Group.

There could not be a better year than 1951 for such a project, which probably offers more technical and creative difficulties than any other amateur film produced in this country.

Movie Crazy

LOOK FOR THE LABEL: and most cineasts take their greatest pleasure in finding it—recognizing Welles by the halo of low-key light surrounding the black silhouette, right foreground, which is speaking; Cocteau by a trick of making the camera seem a blasphemous trespasser; Griffith by the kind of panoramic compositions Breughel might have sketched if he'd been at Alfalfa Tech. But in how many—apart from Lewis Milestone—do we look for anything as untechnical as a message? Often we get it, crude and otiose; but in him we seek it. We wonder, not whether he has changed his lens, but whether he has changed his mind. Does war still goad and enrage him, or does he now shrug it off? And for what good reasons? And soon we are thinking philosophically, following the logic of a plea. Even in *The Halls of Montezuma*, that restless compassion was not subdued: informing its screams of colour and blasts of noise was the same shrewd and honourable mind. Its allegiances have become more local, its passions less generalised: but its sympathies are implacable. The amphibious Bren-carriers leave the warm hollow of the landing-craft; and Milestone cuts to one man's face, looking enviously back at the great, safe mouth he has left; then to another, and another; and he shows us again the mouth of safety. A hard, and in other hands embarrassing, analogy has been drawn; and for this and a dozen other sequences one forgave Milestone the routine banality of the last half-reel. Cocteau said once that art was a very simple method of saying very complex things; and that is Milestone's way with war. There is great demand for this, and only he can do it.

★

Dodge City, San Francisco, Meet Me in St. Louis, Flame of New Orleans, Pittsburgh, Mr. Smith Goes to Washington, In Old Chicago—the list is endless. Much of the middle strata of American movies has been made up of films about places, regional films; many of them cheap, most of them "spacious", all of them proud. We do this rarely: in British films regional atmosphere is always a background, used for effects of ironic contrast (*The Thirty-Nine Steps*) or for local comic colour (*Whisky Galore*). The Americans, with their enormous pride in "having roots" ("Get yourself a piece of earth, son") use places as heroes; sometimes a whole state is the protagonist, as in "Oklahoma"!, which John Ford should one day film. The assumption in British films is that leading characters should be well-bred enough not to show their origin: they are the same everywhere. Or maybe it is just that the same actors always play them. Howbeit, I look in vain for *The Swindon Story, The Hull Incident, Devonshire Heavenshire* (a musical), *In Old Rutland, The Toast of Liverpool* or, more simply: *Grimshy*.

★

A word about *Drôle de Drame*, at which the press blinked, rubbed its eyes, and was non-committal. It explores that highest reach of farce and artifice in which the actor takes his part seriously, but mocks himself for playing it. It begins with its tongue in its cheek, and you leave with your tongue in yours; *Kind Hearts and Coronets* is its closest British rival. Its basic joke could not be more outrageous: to put a troupe of supremely Gallic actors into Edwardian England—all playing Englishmen. It is as if the Marx Brothers had been unleashed in the Crystal Palace disguised as Cabinet Ministers.

Carné and Prévert spice their grave charade with frequent surrealist winks: who, for instance (and why) is the man travelling on a tea-trolley through Michel Simon's drawing-room, balancing with a parasol? And one marvels at the effort of imagination which could lead (with every appearance of logic) to the sequence in which Jouvet, playing a rural Bishop masquerading as a Scotsman, is attacked by a milkman shrieking: "Voyons! Un Ecossais avec des oreilles"! This provokes farce's special kind of laughter, when one says to oneself: "Such is the plot that there was no escape from this situation. But not one of these lines would have any meaning at all in any other context". The film is unflaggingly prodigal in laughs like this: at Barrault, diving stark naked into a lily pond; at Rosay, lodging in a Limehouse brothel; and at Simon, feeding flies to his carnivorous flowers.

★

Re-reading Joel Sayre's *The Man on the Ledge*, I paused over a paragraph which reinforced my admiration for Richard Basehart's disquieting display in *Fourteen Hours*. The psychiatrist is explaining to the cop what happens when you make a suggestion to the boy:—

"You can almost hear one part of his mind tell him, 'You're a brave boy, John, you're wonderful. . . . That man who just talked to you is your admirer and friend'. And while this is going on, there's what might be called a *bodily nod*. His head's nodding slightly, and the rest of his body seems to be telling you, 'Yes, I know you're there What you just said is getting my most favourable consideration'. Then the bodily nod will stop while the other part of his mind seems to say 'Watch out . . . Don't trust this man'. Suddenly he'll shake his head and say out loud, 'Nope, I can't do it. Sorry'."

Basehart got that bodily nod with uncanny accuracy; by acting that characteristic dissonance between what the face and limbs say and what the voice says, he solved an ancient problem—that of how to play neurotics without melodramatics or conscious pathos.

A friend tells me that he saw *Fourteen Hours* from the back of the gallery at the Dominion Cinema, where the air is thin. He and Basehart stared across at each other from their respective ledges; and at the precise moment when the searchlight hit Basehart, an usherette flashed her torch in my friend's face. I gather from him that the drop into the three-and-sevenpennies is longer than you'd think.

KEN TYNAN

★ The Seventh Art ★

WITH EYES TO REMEMBER (*Aux Yeux du Souvenir*). This is a film you will remember, with its cleverly conveyed atmosphere of suppressed panic in a blazing air liner. (Cinema advertisement, *Manchester Guardian*.)

★

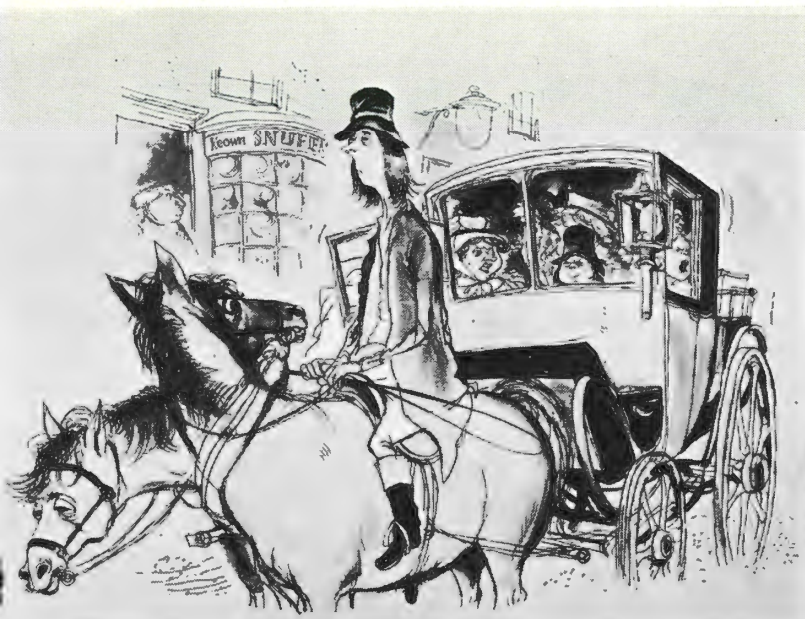
Novel contest at the Regal, Bexleyheath, to boost *Mr. Drake's Duck* was a duck-eating episode. Three people sat at tables on the stage and tried to eat their way through ten different duck dishes in eight minutes. One contestant was successful, the other two reached dish number eight before time was called. (*The Cinema*.)

★

DREAMLAND THEATRE, Los Angeles. Sept. 6th Chinese Show "The Third concubine raises a stepchild". (Cinema advertisement.)

★

Mr. Guest (London Magistrate) said the girl must have some talent because she had some work and once had a film part when only 15 years of age. (Report of court hearing in *News Chronicle*.)



"John Gilpin": Ronald Searle.

The four short *Painter and Poet* films, which form part of the programme at the Telecinema, are an interesting experiment in the technique of the art film. The pictures, commissioned for the occasion, are designed to illustrate the poem either—as in the case of *John Gilpin*—by providing a counter-narrative, or by a visual interpretation of the poem's mood and atmosphere. In this film, intended both to demonstrate and to suggest possibilities for further experiment, the eight poems are: the Scottish *Twa Corbies* (narrator, John Laurie; drawings, Michael Rothenstein); Shakespeare's *Spring and Winter* (sung by Peter Pears; drawings, Mervyn Peake); David Gascoigne's *Winter Garden* (narrator, Michael Redgrave; paintings, Barbara Jones); Dibden's *The Sailor's Consolation* (narrator, Stanley Holloway; drawings, John Minton); Thomas Nashe's *In Time of Pestilence* (narrator, Robert Harris; drawings, Michael Ayrton); Owen Meredith's *Check to Song* (narrator, Eric Portman; drawings, Michael Warre); Kathleen Raine's *The Pythoness* (narrator, Mary Morris; drawings, Henry Moore); and Cowper's *John Gilpin* (narrator, Cecil Truncer; drawings, Ronald Searle). The films, sponsored by the British Film Institute, were produced by John Halas in association with Joan Maude and Michael Warre, who originated the idea and devised the script; artists, narrators and film company gave their services free to further a novel and attractive project.



"Spring and Winter": Mervyn Peake

London

1951



"The Sailor's Consolation": John Minton

Painter and Poet



CANNES FESTIVAL

Gavin Lambert

Art, "cake de fromage", and politics. Left, Cocteau and Becker, right, the Egyptian star Loula Sedky, below, Pudovkin, at the Cannes Festival.



ART AND MAMMON are usually fighting for first place at film festivals, but at Cannes this year—with the Russians participating for the first time—each had a rival in politics. *Liberated China*, the Soviet film refused a showing at the last moment by the Festival committee, cast a shadow across Miss Loula Sedky, the luscious Egyptian package, as she performed her Nephthete postures on the beach; and even Miss Côte d'Azur, Miss Tivoli and Miss Uruguay, hopeful lovelies parading in fur coats every day along the front, seemed more irrelevant than usual. For, although many of the films entered were less than distinguished, the programme as a whole offered an unusually complete guide to the state of the cinema in many countries to-day.

This was not, of course, the surface impression. The scores of celebrities invited, combined with the atmosphere of galas and receptions, stimulate Cannes—like Venice—as a tourist centre, and the glittering presence of so many stars and producers is in itself a guarantee that critical standards cannot be of the highest. The industry's participation is, naturally, for the sake of its own prestige, and different countries have different ideas of prestige. In the case of France and Italy, the most successful compromise possible has now been reached; film companies in these countries have agreed to be represented at festivals by a single organization, Unifrance and Unitalia, respectively, and as a result the general level of the films entered, the comprehensiveness of publicity, the selection of celebrities, is more appropriate and single-minded than that of other countries. The Americans appear unwilling to make a serious bid for artistic trophies: the companies draw lots for participation and then, as if nervous of outright failure, send respectable rather than outstanding films. The lack of satisfactory co-operative agreement means that American interests at festivals are delegated to their trade organisation, the M.P.A.A., which naturally lacks the special flair of Unifrance and Unitalia. A similar dilemma may be observed in the method of British participation, for which the B.F.P.A. does the best it can under terms of reference that are, to say the least of it, difficult.

The surface is very important at Cannes. Countries are

anxious that their own particular receptions should be the best. The Spaniards, for example, sent a lot of dreary films, but held a magnificent midnight gala, at which a number of dancers, including Ana Esmeralda, entertained; it may simply have been coincidence that the Mexican *soirée*, due the next day, was suddenly postponed. At any rate, it was changed into a midnight affair at the Casino two nights later, with supper and cabaret: all this for Bunuel's grim *Los Olvidados*, an unquestionable candidate for one of the top prizes. Of the few hundred

journalists invited, probably only quite a small minority are concerned first of all with the films; the press seats are by no means always full at the *palais du cinéma*, and directors and stars are seldom observed not giving interviews.

In the midst of all this, it is perhaps surprising that the art of the cinema emerges to the extent that it does. But the cinema has always thrived on ballyhoo. There are moments when the whole apparatus of Cannes seems too inflated, too Babylonian, and of course it is extravagant, pretentious, and its range of activities, from the dazzling personal successes to the implicit pathos of Miss Uruguay, has a feverish, exaggerated air: yet this *is* the cinema, and there are few addicts so pure that they will not be partly fascinated as well as infuriated by it. The myths come out into the open, and invade reality for a few weeks.

No doubt the Soviet delegation saw little more than a vast pleasure-drome of western decadence. At all events, their entries were austerity products—a very long life of *Mussorgsky*, a comedy about a village industrialising itself after the war, *The Knight with the Golden Star*, and some didactic regional documentaries—and they were not art, not commerce, but propaganda. The banned *Liberated China*, shown privately after the Festival, turned out to be a 90-minute documentary of the communisation of China, a record of formidable thoroughness, with a few references to imperialist aggression and the traitorous Chiang Kai-Shek. It included a sequence of Chinese peasants dancing gopaks, and a people's opera replacing the ancient folklore of the theatre. There seems little doubt that Soviet cinema is anxious to disown most of the

Personalities at Cannes. Right, the Italian actor Raf Vallone who, with Elena Varzi (Left) plays in "Il Cristo Proibito". Below, Gérard Philipe, appearing in "Juliette".





Curzio Malaparte at Cannes

The village festival in "Cristo Proibito".

Bruno discovers his brother's betrayer. Elena Varzi, Raf Vallone, Philippe Lemaire, in "Cristo Proibito".



qualities that gained it an international reputation in the 20's and 30's, and the sadness of this collapse was reinforced at a show organised by the Cinémathèque Française, at which the first two reels of Ermier's magnificent *Fragment of an Empire* (1930) were shown. Here was the Russian cinema.

In France and Italy the pressure of a post-war climate appeared no less acute, but it arrived obliquely: *malaise* was reflected in the scenes of poverty, violence and dispossession in the Italian films, in the attempted escape into fantasy in Carné's *Juliette ou la Clef des Songes*. This must be counted the most depressing artistic event of the Festival. The story tells of a young man who meets his beloved in a dream, affianced to a mysterious bluebeard living in a castle above a village where everyone has lost his memory; as she finally eludes him, he wakes. In life he finds that she rejects him, so he commits suicide and returns to capture her ideal image again in the land of dreams. The fantasy seems without point, and the dreary dialogue allows it sometimes to sink into bathos; it obliges Gérard Philipe almost to parody himself, and carefully mounted though the film is, it has the same overblown, stilted quality that wrecked *Les Portes de la Nuit*. It bears all the signs of a director who has lost his original inspiration and arrived at an impasse.

The most successful French entry was Becker's *Edouard et Caroline*, a slight and at times overstretched comedy about a few hours of emotional complications in the marriage of two young people. It is brilliantly played by Daniel Gelin and Anne Vernon, has some excellent satire on high society, and the intimacy at which Becker excels. Becker remarked that it represented for him an exercise in style; the action is confined to two apartments, and his swift, fragmentated style—he usually employs a great number of camera set-ups—is smoothed down, though losing nothing in virtuosity.

It seems a pity, though, that the French did not enter what is not only their best recent film, but one of the outstanding post-war achievements, Bresson's *Journal d'un Curé de Campagne*. This latest work by the director of *Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne*, with its almost Dreyer-like concentration on close-ups, has an austere and unique beauty.

Having missed De Sica's *Miracolo a Milano*, the most striking Italian entry was to me *Il Cristo Proibito*, Curzio Malaparte's first film. Its personality is very similar to that of "Kapput" and "La Peau"—violent, extravagant, not a little pretentious, but extraordinarily powerful. A kind of intellectual storm-trooper, Malaparte grafts his current philosophy

onto a simple revenge story of a man who comes back to his village after the war, learns that his brother was betrayed to the Germans, and determines to kill the betrayer. The events are designed to show the individual being purged of violence by his own violence, and the innocent people unavoidably sacrificed for this purgation. There is little to suggest that this view of life is at all seriously felt, and the two elements never properly fuse, but as a film *about* violence *Il Cristo Proibito* is remarkable. The characters exist on a half-real, half-symbolic plane, the backgrounds have both a local and unreal flavour; the story proceeds at a slow inexorable tempo, with Malaparte using an incessantly travelling camera and grandiloquently effective compositions. One sequence, of a local festival—at which a peasant stands in front of a huge white cross and incites a villager to offer himself for crucifixion to expiate the general sin—fuses Christian and pagan elements in a unique way, combined with an overpowering use of sound and brilliantly controlled crowd movements.

A more ingrained and organic violence is to be found in Bunuel's *Los Olvidados*; in the backstreet life of Mexican slum children Bunuel finds images as frightening and bestial as anything in *L'Age d'Or*. His picture of the little gang dominated by a bloodthirsty adolescent, with its subsidiary sketches of poverty-stricken families, odd relics of superstition, exploding intermittently into acts of appalling violence, is done in a harsh, unsparing style, pitiless and angry.





Left, the Italian cameraman Aldo, with the star, Suzanne Cloutier, and the director, Marcel Carné, of "Juliette". Right: A scene from, "Los Olvidados".



A sinister dream sequence reminds one of Bunuel's earlier style, and also the use of natural incongruities—the black hen strutting up to the body of the blind man, the hungry dogs that follow the children, the camera peering at a frightened girl between the upstretched ears of a donkey. *Los Olvidados* was one of the most original films of the Festival.

A film of minor interest, certainly superior to the other South American entries, was the Brazilian *Caicara*, Cavalcanti's first production there. An orphan girl, born of leprous parents, marries an island fisherman to gain her release from an institution, arrives at the island, dislikes both it and him, and the drama promises no more than a slightly improved version of *Stromboli*; the story, in fact, never moves away from magazine level, but the makers develop a distinctive feeling for background and local character. The film was directed by an Italian actor, photographed by the British H. E. Fowle, and edited by Oswald Hafenrichter.

The most characteristic German entry was *Dreams of Death*, a gothic fantasy involving the figure of Hoffmann, and a young photographer who relives three of his tales. Earnestly but entertainingly fabricated, it captures more of the Hoffmann spirit than did Powell and Pressburger, and as an anthology of German cinema effects and moods of twenty-five years ago should offer interesting rewards to Siegfried Kracauer.

Among shorts, *Miroirs d'Hollande* (which won first prize) was a fascinating impression of the Dutch landscape shown entirely through reflections in water; and *Colette* offered a glimpse of this formidable personage in conversation with Cocteau. Jennings' *Family Portrait*, though fitted with a French commentary, did not appear to travel well; perhaps it can only be appreciated by people familiar with the traditions and associations it evokes.

As far as one can reliably generalise from the films at Cannes, which did not always represent the best current level

of their various countries, two important things stand out. The first is that the cinema has reached a general level of technical competence. The films from South America, from Spain, from Greece, from Eastern Europe, were nearly all creatively null or naive, but they showed a most respectable proficiency. As an industry the cinema continues to expand, to entrench itself; as an art, it seems to have little organised existence outside Western Europe (including Britain and Sweden), and the United States. The Far East remains, as so often, an enigma. In communist countries it has become an ideological weapon; little of interest has emerged from Germany since the war; Cavalcanti, maybe, will begin a movement in Brazil, and Bunuel has for the moment settled in Mexico. In Italy, in France and in Britain, film-makers are disturbed by unstable economic conditions, and by the end of 1951 the great Italian renaissance will probably be seen to have suffered from this. But even more disturbing is the instability of spiritual conditions. Nobody at Cannes commented on the irony of the fact that the chief awards of a luxurious festival went to the humanely pessimistic De Sica, to the savage Bunuel, and to a Swedish adaptation of Strindberg's cruel and bitter *Miss Julie*. If one adds that the fourth most interesting film was *Il Cristo Proibito*, the Soviet delegation's dismissal of the entire function as an outbreak of western decadence has its point—though it was made in the wrong way. But then, *Mussorgsky*, *The Knight with the Golden Star* and *Liberated China* offer for many an even more depressing alternative, and the same is true of the incongruous materialist optimism of *The Next Voice You Hear*, America's religious fable about a small-town family that hears, and is comforted by, the voice of God. As an art, the cinema is on its way to becoming the most powerful medium of disillusion in the present age; as an industry, of course, it continues to serve as an opiate for millions.



Left: Anne Vernon and Daniel Gelin in "Edouard et Caroline". Below: Colette and Cocteau in "Colette".



THE CASE OF DE SICA

Reactions to "Miracolo a Milano" at Cannes

John Maddison

(Antonio Petrucci, in the April SIGHT & SOUND, gave a detailed summary of the story of the film which tells, it may be recalled, of Toto the foundling, of his upbringing by old Lolotta, her death and his transfer to the workhouse, his emergence to live with a group of beggars and out-of-works, their dispossession by the rich landlord when oil is struck on their squatting-ground, Lolotta's visitation with a gift for Toto of a magical dove, which carries him and his friends through tribulations to final escape heavenwards from their present world. The film begins: ONCE UPON A TIME. . .)

THE AUDIENCE AT the 1949 Knokke Festival left one in no doubt about what view it took of *Bicycle Thieves*: the reception was tumultuously favourable. Such displays of emotion are disturbing to the self-consciously prudent in these matters, and voices in dissent were not lacking around the festive tables of the Belgian littoral. Time has largely stilled these voices. De Sica's film stands as the most profound and moving work the cinema has given us for many a long day.

What of *Miracolo a Milano*, so eagerly awaited? The audience at the Palais des Festivals at Cannes a week or two ago gave it, if anything, an even more rapturous welcome than De Sica's other film had received. "*Miracolo a Milano* was applauded," records *Le Canard Enchaîné*, with its usual moderation; "Jean Cocteau was in an ecstasy of admiration and swooned on the astonished shoulder of Vittorio De Sica". But next day, over the Cinzanos and the "dry's" in the Mediterranean sunshine, the note of reservation was sounded. De Sica's film, affirmed certain highly respected voices, was overloaded. It was confused. It was *vieux jeu*.

I have seen only two criticisms of the film of more than a line or so since returning from Cannes; they reflect the dual reaction to *Miracolo a Milano*. The first, Georges Sadoul's short panegyric in "Lettres Françaises", need not be lingered over. Like most of his writing these days, it is an act of piety. Much of what he says about the film's originality and its distinction is true, but he says it pompously and unconvincingly.

While disagreeing almost entirely with the second piece, an extended criticism by Claude Mauriac in the right-wing *Figaro Littéraire*, I found it more interesting. Mauriac's approach is symptomatic of such adverse criticism as the film has received. He begins by admitting the power of the opening sequences. He wanted to shout out. Who wouldn't in the presence of De Sica's humanity and skill as he depicts the tremulous pleasures of the discovery of the baby Toto beneath a cauliflower and his upbringing by Mother Lolotta? But then the first disenchantment occurs. De Sica gathers his down-and-outs of the Milan wasteland into a patch of wintry sunshine. Mauriac finds this over-pretty. He deplores—the phrase is a revealing one—its lack of discretion. It is "bad literature", i.e., the sort people read. Monsieur Mauriac's brows are by now, one imagines, deeply furrowed. He appears to see influences and fake symbols everywhere. The villain

Rappi is Judas Iscariot. Jean-Jacques Rousseau has misted over the view-finder for De Sica. The effects are second-hand Clair, debased Chaplin. Moreover, like Chaplin, De Sica is beginning (with some reason, says Mauriac grudgingly) to think himself a genius. The lad's getting to have ideas above his station. Which leads to a comparison (an insensitive one, in my view) between *Miracolo a Milano* and *Modern Times*.

One wonders what the butterfly is feeling as it waits to be crushed on the wheel of Monsieur Mauriac's erudition. Complete astonishment, first of all, surely. De Sica made it clear, in a statement issued on his arrival in Cannes, that his intentions in making the film were not particularly ideological, sociological, political or anything of that sort. He drew attention to the fact that much of it is derivative—old cinema stuff. (One does not remember Orson Welles being so obliging about *his* derivative though admittedly individual *Citizen Kane*). Mauriac and others appear to have disregarded this statement, and since English critics will perhaps be tempted to do the same, it may be useful to quote it in full.

"The subject of *Miracolo a Milano*", said De Sica, "is taken from a novel by Cesare Zavattini which appeared in 1943. The film is a fable for children and grown ups. The effects used—old Lolotta coming down from the sky, the layer of gas rolling back as the beggar-folk from the vacant lot breathe on it, the descent in filigree of the angels who pursue Lolotta, the sunset—are all childish "tricks". Very simple, infantile almost, born of an urchin's imagination.

"In shooting the various scenes in the film, I was on my guard against thinking too much of logic. Cartesian logic is excluded from the stories we tell to children. So it is with the petroleum in the film, which burns a whole night through, and in the morning no longer burns. . . .

"The film is, I repeat, very simple; simple as the goodness of humble people and the unaffectedness of children. The 'special effects' are a homage to Méliès, the first artisan of all the games which may be imagined for the delight of grown-ups and of the very young".

Not being a cinema artist myself, *manqué* or otherwise, I have an enormous and perhaps exaggerated respect for those who are. I took De Sica's word for it and expected the moral of his film to be pure copybook. It is: the main protagonist



Toto is one whose "Good day" to you really does mean "Good day", and though poor, he triumphs. Of course, since one is now rather a long way from one's own childhood, the mind is not free from apprehension. Is Toto going to be too good, too perfect? But, at those moments when the whole thing is threatening to topple over into sickliness, De Sica saves it with his splendid *coups de cinéma*. Fear dissolves into pleasure, good humour and laughter. In this, he is undoubtedly helped by the performance of Francesco Golisano as Toto the Good. The love scene between him and Edwige (played by Brunella Bovo) is as touching as anything Chaplin has given us, and its lyricism is entirely original. It will stand out in the dreary wastes of screen amour.

As De Sica promised, the "tricks" he uses in *Miracolo a Milano* are none of them new; hence the references to Clair and Chaplin in various comments on the film. But no question of "plagiarism" arises. De Sica takes the cinema's box of tricks and uses it in a highly personal and characteristic way. If the oncoming column of top-hatted capitalists, and the generals whose prowess turns upon *bel canto*, evoke memories of Clair, they are freshly created and could only have come from the hand that made *Sciusecia* and *Bicycle Thieves*. With so much talk of Clair and Chaplin, there will be a danger that other and earlier sources may be overlooked. De Sica has not been ashamed of going back to the days "when the movies were young". A flight of top-hats in the film recalls for a brief moment the flight of pumpkins in a well-loved primitive from the Cinematèque Française. Much of the "screen magic" De Sica uses is pure Méliès, carried out with modern equipment. As did Méliès, he uses his effects boldly and unpretentiously. (The reference in Mauriac's criticism to the bad—because "literary"—influence of Cocteau is singularly false and inappropriate.) De Sica is, however, both simpler and much more complex as an artist than Méliès

and the other primitives. There is a pathos and metaphysical depth in what he does that goes far beyond any technical advantage he has over them.

The narrative structure of *Miracolo a Milano* presents a problem. It is uneven, rambles about a bit in the middle, and is a long way (the opening section apart) from the homogeneous and almost classical purity of *Bicycle Thieves*. To come to it expecting this sort of unity of pattern would be a mistake. I must apologise for using Mauriac again as a stalking-horse, especially since his article ends with a charming and obviously sincere tribute to De Sica. But his comment here too is symptomatic. He compares a film with a symphony or a poem, and by implication finds *Miracolo a Milano* disastrously wanting. But a film (even a "great" film) knows no such limitations. Heaven forbid that it should. It can observe other and looser narrative or thematic conventions, even puerile ones, as in the case of the Marx Brothers' films. There is, in fact, room for a good deal more experiment in the layout of film narrative. (To digress for a moment, Bresson's extraordinary *Journal d'Un Curé de Campagne* has shown that such an experiment may even, in the right hands, tend towards the direct transcription of certain extremely personal kinds of prose fiction.) De Sica's film is not unlike an old-fashioned "novel in periodical parts". In saying this, we need not seek to excuse its quite evident weaknesses: there is no very clear line, no real and organic climax. The *dénouement*, as Toto and his friends are magically released from the police vans and soar on broomsticks above the Cathedral spires towards the ethereal, is perhaps just a little abrupt in contrivance. But if we accept the fact that De Sica has chosen to create a film tale in this diffused way, we shall be more ready to accept also the multiplicity of episodes and the wealth of "gags" with which *Miracolo a Milano* would otherwise seem to be unduly weighted. The richness of his comic invention is truly remarkable. We are left wondering at the versatility of an artist who can give us, one after the other, two films so unlike as *Bicycle Thieves* and *Miracolo a Milano*. The film he is now making, *Umberto D.*, will be a return to the idiom of *Bicycle Thieves*, the story of an old man who wishes to commit suicide but decides in the end to live for his dog, from whom he cannot separate. Zavattini has again worked with him on the script. *Umberto D.*, should not fail to be an interesting experience.

It is, I feel, necessary to draw attention once again to what De Sica has said about the absence from his work of concealed political intentions. He has suffered in this respect so much from the Yahoos. And, unhappily, such contaminations are threatening even the most liberal of minds. Of course, *Miracolo a Milano* has all kinds of overtones. Some of them are of the wider political sort, from which art, if it is living and contemporary, cannot escape. De Sica is, like so many more of us, a Western European caught between the frightful millstones of to-day. The final gesture—the poor who are the good escaping to another and more peaceful world—is not so much deliberate and rationalised as instinctive and inevitable. This may serve to explain the paradox between his statement in an interview with J-C. Tacchella in Cannes that his film is not a "political" film and his other statement, recorded by Petrucci in the April *SIGHT AND SOUND*, that it is a desperate film.

Nevertheless, the critics will be well advised to leave their political bibles at home before seeing the film. Méliès will be a surer touchstone than either More or Marx.

THE CRITICS

AND

THE BOX-OFFICE

Leonard England

IN A RECENT issue of SIGHT AND SOUND, a leading article discussed the trade polls of 1950 and found them depressing: not one of the staff's best ten films of 1950 had also been listed among the best ten at the box-office. Trailing their coats, the editors suggested that this fact provided an opportunity for a stinging come-back at the critical abilities of their reviewers.

Probably no such come-back is possible. But there is surely more to be said than has yet been said in SIGHT AND SOUND on behalf of a cinemagoing public which thronged to a *Birth of a Nation* before it turned its back on an *Intolerance*, and which has ever since given its support to at least as many important films as it has ignored. The bad taste of the public is often deplored: its equally frequent good taste is usually forgotten.

Exactly what the public as a whole does like is of course a matter of the most furious debate. How can one find out? Actual box-office receipts are a closely guarded trade secret. Trade guesses or polls like those of Josh Billings and of the *Motion Picture Herald* are probably reliable as far as they go, but are founded on questionable samples. Observation of cinemagoers gives one only a regional picture; interviewing one's personal friends is a worse than useless guide to the taste of the country as a whole. Polls like the Daily Mail National Film Award, the Picturegoer Award or the Bernstein questionnaires are necessarily overweighted by the replies of film enthusiasts and by "prestige" answers. While the most reliable poll of all—that of the Government's Social Survey—is much more concerned with who goes to the pictures than with what they like when they get there.

Matters become only a little clearer when one considers the opinions of the critics, for in this country there are none of the critics' awards that flourish in the United States. Although a far more homogeneous group than the general public, the reviewers can differ widely in their approach to specific films. *Chance of a Lifetime* provided an excellent example of this: regarded by some as "dull and boring", it was none the less selected by the British Film Academy as one of the films of the year. And the reviews of *The Browning Version* by two critics usually so in sympathy as C. A. Lejeune and Dilys Powell are so discordant as almost to imply that they had seen two different films.

For all this, however, it is possible to say roughly on the one hand, that "this is the sort of film that the public likes" and, on the other hand, "this is the sort of film that the critics think is good"—the difference between "like" and "good" being, of course, an important one, to which further reference will be made. Polls, box-office assessments, all judgments of popularity confirm, say, the success of John Mills and of the Neagle-Wilcox team. Though it is far more difficult to produce an exact picture of critical opinion, there are few critics who, for example, do not accept Bette Davis as a great film actress, or do not believe that Abbott and

Costello may be for others but are not for them.

Most critics would be too careful to give a list of the "best" films of recent years, but a search through past reviews reveals that the films which have received most critical acclaim include *The Third Man*, *The Best Years of Our Lives*, and *Odd Man Out*. The first of these was the biggest box-office success of 1949, the second of 1948, and the third was a close runner-up in 1947. *Morning Departure* and *The Happiest Days of Your Life*—films for which there exists an absolute financial criterion of success—are not merely those which have in 1950 most rapidly repaid the money borrowed from the National Film Finance Corporation: they are also the two that have been most praised by the critics.

Points of comparison between critics and box-office are almost endless. How many critics would disagree with the suggestion that, whatever the faults of the film, *The Red Shoes* is the best picture made by Powell and Pressburger since the war? The public, which ignored many of their other presentations, made this one a box-office hit. Could the critics find three films which better represented the war-time record of the three services than *The Way Ahead*, *In Which We Serve* and *The Way to the Stars*? The public could not.

Directors approved by critical opinion are not—in the feature film world at least—neglected by the public. It sometimes happens, of course, that a Zinnemann or an Ophüls makes a fine film that nobody goes to, or even gets an opportunity to go to. But Carol Reed is not merely the British director who receives the most critical comment, he is also the one who probably provides the highest proportion of box-office successes. Anthony Asquith is a success with both critics and public. If the monographs on directors published by the British Film Institute are any guide, then Frank Capra is one of the most important American directors. He is also the only American director to have made two films in the last twenty years that have headed British box-office polls as the picture of the year.

One point on which the critics are almost unanimous is that Chaplin is the greatest screen figure to date. He is also a man who has been made very rich by receipts from the millions who have seen his films. Disney reached the height of his critical acclaim with *Snow White*: the film (unlike any of its successors) is now ranked as one of the biggest money-makers in the history of the cinema.

Among stars who have appeared in the annual lists of box-office successes are Spencer Tracy, Bette Davis and Gary Cooper. Among the biggest money-making films of their year, as well as those listed above, are *49th Parallel* and *Pygmalion*. Among winners of the Picturegoer Award are Leslie Howard and Laurence Olivier—the latter having won it no less than four times.

To list these similarities of opinion between critics and public is not to imply that there are no differences. Of course there are many. But they do not necessarily mean that

audiences are gullible or have no critical sense. For one thing, critics and public go to the pictures in very different frames of mind. The critics go prepared, often with a knowledge of the original story, always with a technical ability to appreciate camera angles, montage and directorial idiosyncrasies. The public goes to enjoy itself, and judges films on their entertainment value alone. Of course photography, editing skill and the rest contribute to such entertainment, and critics who rebuke a film because too much of it has been shot in semi-darkness, or because it is too static, may simply be giving expression to the average cinemagoer's subconscious reasons for thinking it "dull". But many aspects of a film which appear important to the critics will be quite irrelevant to the average member of the audience.

To take an example, the critics as a body have a far higher degree of education than the mass of filmgoers. Any box-office smash hit—and this article is only concerned with the five or ten pictures each year that appeal to *all* types of cinemagoer—must attract the millions who left school at fourteen and have never bothered with further education. This fact is often quoted in discussion of the cinema; less often realised are the implications that follow from it. For instance, the millions who last year bewildered the critics by liking what they felt to be very inferior versions of *Treasure Island* and *The Forsyte Saga* were judging them by standards very different from the experts'. The critics said for the most part that these films were far less good than they could have been had they followed the originals more closely. The public were saying that Stevenson and Galsworthy (of whom many cinemagoers had probably never heard) were better script writers than most employed in the studios, and that the stories they wrote (however garbled in transition) were better than scores of derivatory ones mass-produced every year.

The limited general education of the cinemagoing mass public also automatically puts all foreign films out of the running. The problem goes far deeper than language, and will not be solved by dubbing; the whole idiom of a French or an Italian film is strange to the audience. The same applies to American films, such as *All the King's Men*, which deal with aspects of American life not yet made as familiar by Hollywood as Broadway or Arizona. As for films like *Citizen Kane* which were "box-office poison", these surely require an exercise of logical thought which those who left school at fourteen cannot be expected to make, and do not probably even know how to make.

Moreover, the critic will rightly feel it his duty to consider the "purpose" of the film, and that purpose may not be merely to entertain. Even films like *Hue and Cry* and *Jour de Fête* which have no "significance" or "message" are still considered by such standards. A critic, therefore, will be predisposed to find a novelette translated into a film a less worthwhile effort than the screen version of *Hamlet*, and *Tales of Hoffmann* more important than *She's My Lovely*.

This critical approach is bound to be alien to the average cinemagoer. He will not go to *Hamlet* automatically expecting to see something more entertaining than *Piccadilly Incident*, and he will judge both films as entertainment of *their own types*. By mentally dividing films into types—though he might be unable to say what the types were beyond "western", "musical", "thriller" and so on—he decides on the merits or demerits of the particular film by its ability to entertain in comparison with other films of its own genus.

This is particularly important in explaining the differences do that undoubtedly exist between critic and public. The

critic looks for what he thinks *good*; the average filmgoer for what he *likes*. The latter may well consider a film good *of its type*, but the "type" may be one of which the critic intrinsically disapproves. But it is surely significant that the box-office successes which have been rejected by the critics have nearly all been granted by them technical excellence within their own spheres.

Of its type (the Cinderella theme) has any film of recent years been as well done as *Spring in Park Lane*? Of its type, has any post-war British musical the brightness and the good tunes that Ivor Novello gave to *The Dancing Years*? Of its type—and for all its undoubted "pseudo-religion", "pseudo-sex" and vulgarity the film must primarily be regarded as one of spectacle—surely *Samson and Delilah* has in the falling of the temple the best spectacle since the earthquake in *San Francisco*? Of its type (the full scale musical comedy) has *Annie Get Your Gun* been bettered for years; or have tunes as consistently good as those of Irving Berlin in this film been heard in the last fifty such musicals? Is there any crooner more effective than Bing Crosby, and has any woman in Hollywood better legs than Betty Grable?

With this in mind the quality of selection exercised by the public becomes even more noticeable. Producers who have tried to cash in on an original success with a follow-up in kind (say, *Casablanca* with *Passage to Marseilles*, or *The Wicked Lady* with *Idol of Paris*) have found to their cost that there is no magic formula at the box-office except quality entertainment within the individual types of film. Sir Alexander Korda (who under-rates his public far less than many producers) found this out when he released *Bonnie Prince Charlie*: annoyed by the critics' slating of the film, he issued special advertisements appealing to the public to ignore what they had read and to see a new film by the producer of so many past popular successes. Most cinemagoers rightly took no notice.

Even a team so exceptionally successful in recent years as the Neagle-Wilding-Wilcox group still receives no mercy when they drop from the high standards that they usually maintain in their own type of film. Thus neither Wilcox nor Anna Neagle could save *Elizabeth of Ladymead*, and neither Wilcox nor Michael Wilding could make *Into the Blue* a box-office success.

On the other hand, producers who have presented something new and good have often found a receptive public. The producer of *Home of the Brave* failed to find the necessary finance within the industry, but went on to make the biggest American box-office picture of the year, the public proving far less hidebound than the trade had suggested. *Pinky* and *Gentleman's Agreement* may seem to shirk the real points at issue in their studies of the colour-bar and of anti-Semitism: whether or not they are the perfect pictures on their subjects, they certainly get away from the lowest common denominator of film entertainment, and still make big film money.

The argument presented here on behalf of the public is two-fold: first, that the taste of the cinemagoer is far less divergent from that of the critics than is commonly believed: second, that where there is a divergence this is often due to a different standard applied in judging the film, and does not mean that, within these limits, the public shows lack of discrimination. Of course this argument in no way affects the value and importance of the critics. Their function and that of the box-office are complementary. What is needed is not that the two points of view should be merged, but that the points of similarity and difference between them should be more clearly appreciated.



Right: Kirk Douglas, Jan Sterling, Bob Arthur in "Ace in the Hole". Above, Billy Wilder on location.

Films of the Month



ACE IN THE HOLE

IN *SUNSET BOULEVARD* the Brackett-Wilder team took an outsize, legendary character, examined her coldly and ironically—but did not destroy her legendary quality. Billy Wilder, now on his own, does rather the same, in a very different setting, in the hard and brilliant *Ace in the Hole*. The larger-than-life character is Tatum; a rough, ruthless, hard-drinking, unscrupulous journalist reduced by a series of dismissals to the local paper in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where he waits in growing desperation for the story which will restore his reputation.

It comes: Tatum is on the spot when a man is trapped in an old Indian mine after a cliff cave-in. With brutal precision the film examines the technique and apparatus of sensationalism. To spin out his story, Tatum bribes the corrupt, indolent sheriff into demanding a rescue method certain to take a week; he persuades the victim's wife, Lorraine, a sullen, discontented blonde who has been waiting for a chance to escape, to play the sorrowing wife; he abandons his own paper for a New York daily. The crowds arrive; the ramshackle garage in the desert becomes the centre of an encampment of cars and tents; with them come the loudspeakers, endlessly playing a special song for the trapped man, the souvenir sellers, the carnival. The mood of the sensation seekers shifts from restless apathy to a more horrible vicarious excitement. Ironic and bitter contrasts are pointed between the dignity of the victim's parents, his own acceptance of Tatum as a friend, and the shifty opportunism of the sheriff, Lorraine's vicious boredom. The technique, in contrast to the leisurely, personal style of *Sunset Boulevard*, is one of impersonal, direct observation. The handling of the crowd compares interestingly with that employed on the rather similar occasion in *Fourteen Hours*. Wilder isolates individuals not in distracting asides from the main theme, but to provide an added, sharpened comment on the mass.

Parallel with this investigation runs that of Tatum himself, in his relations with the sheriff, with his editors, with Lorraine, who is played strikingly by Jan Sterling. Kirk Douglas' brilliant performance, a more mature and harsh variation on the part played in *The Champion*, establishes Tatum's driving force, his immense energy, his concentration. Neither it nor the script prepares us for the film's conclusion.

After almost a week, with the drills still pounding at the rock, Tatum finds that the trapped man is dying, that the easy way of rescue has become impossible. In revulsion against what they have done he turns on Lorraine: there is a struggle in which she stabs him with her scissors. Tatum

makes a last, futile effort at rescue; the man dies, and he dismisses the crowds. Then, the New York plans abandoned, he returns to the Albuquerque office, staggers in to tell his story, and falls dead. The ending is cleverly managed, and there is no surrender to sentiment (Wilder, indeed, is probably incapable of it) but it lacks the force of the logical, cruel conclusion, which demands that Tatum go through with his scheme.

The relative failure of the ending is an illustration of Wilder's limitations. His is a talent which one respects rather than likes. This is not the result of his choice of subject, nor of his occasional tendency to vulgarity (*A Foreign Affair*) or to sensationalism for its own sake (*The Lost Weekend*); it is because he seems to lack the powers of analysis which his cold, observant style demands. It is the technique of a reporter, brilliantly conveying the immediate impact of a character or situation, less successful in developing it. A more human director, or a more skilful analyst, could have made more out of Tatum's clash of conscience; Wilder is content to report it, as he reported Norma Desmond's tragedy, and Tatum is credible as a character in the sense that Norma Desmond is credible—a gigantic figure who catches the imagination, so that one accepts him at his own valuation. But as writer (*Ace in the Hole* is scripted by Wilder, Lesser Samuels and Walter Newman) and director Wilder has developed an exact, sardonic, objective style whose technical assurance carries him over passages where the quality of thought is unduly superficial. In *Ace in the Hole* style and purpose achieve for the most part a fusion more impressive even than in *Sunset Boulevard*, and the result is perhaps his most remarkable film.

PENELOPE HOUSTON

DAVID

THE FILM SECTION of the Festival of Britain has enterprisingly given a young director of outstanding promise an opportunity to make a film under conditions of greater freedom than he has been allowed before. The result is a success for all concerned. Paul Dickson, who wrote and directed *David*, found a memorable central figure around which to develop a story and re-create a communal background: D. R. Griffith, as David, relives on the screen episodes from his own life with a touching dignity and simplicity. His manner and his appearance—the nobly battered face, sharp and candid eyes, the stiff, deliberate, yet relaxed bearing—are in themselves an invitation to recollect the strenuous passage of time; friendly,



La



Ronde



but withdrawn and solitary, he has only to walk down a street, to stand on top of a hill, to communicate something of the struggle of the years stretching back to the first decade of his life in a Welsh mining town.

This quality of the character is skilfully heightened by presenting his life as a reminiscence; the story of *David* is told by a young man who knew him as a boy, and the film is a series of recollected episodes. Within the framework of the present, in which David is a caretaker at a school, the film goes back to his romance with a young local girl, his marriage, a pit disaster, the birth of his son, on whom so many hopes were centred and who died as a young man from tuberculosis. We see him go to the Eisteddfod, where his poem fails but receives an honourable mention, and finally his moment of recognition at the school prize-giving ceremony, when a visiting man of letters pays tribute to him. These scenes are related with a quiet sympathy and warm perception; they describe ordinary people, infuse life and colour into a background, in a way rare in films of this country. *David* is not only one of the few authentic regional films made here, but reasserts the human values that documentary film-making has lacked for so long. Its faults lie in points of technique—the rather uncertain beginning, the looseness of structure that results, in the middle section, in rather too many short scenes—and these are not the usual flaws of British documentary. The sequence which attempts a deliberate effect of style (the cross-cutting of the mining accident and the childbirth) belongs to the type of film-making which *David* elsewhere completely avoids.

Paul Dickson has handled the non-professional players with an instinctive appreciation of their qualities, and Gwyneth Petty, who plays David's young wife, makes a first appearance of charm and freshness. The music, though (by Grace Williams), is over-indulged, for the dramatic sequences stand on their own and have no need of its support.

GAVIN LAMBERT.

LA RONDE

Reviewed by Richard Winnington

THE RELEASE OF *La Ronde* in London is exceptionally good timing. For Max Ophuls' film, gay, stylish and civilised, has already in a way become a part of the Festival which its Curzon run is likely to outlast. The immediate success of *La Ronde* is due neither to the X certificate nor to sensational reports of its wicked daring (useful as these factors will no doubt be in recovering the large price paid). There was an audience waiting for the film before the critics had time to write about it, an audience who had sensed the very special expression of a very personal talent.

I am unacquainted with Schnitzler, but he has clearly been as delicately and firmly bent to the design of Ophuls as was Stefan Zweig in *Letter from an Unknown Woman*. *La Ronde* is a comment, romantically phrased, on the deceptions of love. It is framed in the stylised elegance of Hapsburg Vienna at that period when, the days of power over and the decline well advanced, it earned the title of "gay" and launched a thousand musical comedies. But, in all of the nine episodes which are linked together in a roundabout of love, the situations and the dialogue take us wittily, painfully and

poignantly close to the life we know today. The thesis: that in the pursuit of love we deceive first ourselves and then our partner, who repeats the process, and so on and so on.

Thus the prostitute gives herself free to the soldier who can't be rid of her too quickly or too rudely in order to seduce the maidservant who, when he has become vulnerable to her through love, betrays him with the young master. And he in his next step to manhood forsakes the maidservant to seduce the young wife, who returns guiltily to the sanctimonious husband who is deceiving her with the shopgirl he has set up in an apartment. She in turn becomes a ready victim of the egocentric poet who, tired as soon as he has started the affair, resumes his amorous duel with the actress whose ruthless self-love is even greater than his own. She in turn avidly pursues the Count whose coldblooded ceremonial dissipations lead him out of her arms into those of the prostitute of the original episode. And what more ironic and fitting than that on his way out the Count should run into the original soldier on his way in—seeking the only comfort procurable?

It will suffice to list the players in the order of their appearance and to state that, with the exception of the last two, they give the faultless, apprehensive performances without which the whole delicate structure would have crashed. They are Simone Signoret, Serge Reggiani, Simone Simon, Daniel Gélin, Danielle Darrieux, Fernand Gravey, Odette Joyeux, Jean-Louis Barrault, Isa Miranda, Gérard Philipe.

The story is set in motion by Anton Walbrook, unrecognisably polished and sympathetic after his years on the English screen. As master of ceremonies, commentator, and minor participant in the piece, he steps from the present day into the romantically misted Vienna of the past, and in the deserted square starts the merry-go-round (literally) and the first adventure to the tune of a waltz by Oscar Straus. This haunting waltz tune recurs throughout the film and becomes an ironic signal of the act of consummation; of love's triumph or defeat, whichever you will.

Though Ophuls can leave you in little doubt—for the episodes build up to an increasingly bitter comment, and the two final scenes cruelly mock the plight of their trapped victims. Yet he is less successful with these culminating scenes than with the open and gaily cynical earlier passages which prepare the way. To be fair, there are signs of some clumsy and harmful cutting in these two stories, but to be equally honest there are greater signs of serious miscasting in the selection of Gérard Philipe for the count and Isa Miranda for the actress.

In the exchanges between the young wife (Danielle Darrieux) and the husband (Fernand Gravey), *La Ronde* touches the apex of brilliance. The cutting, the magical movement of the camera round the beds, the dialogue, the acting, contribute to a wickedly amusing double exposure of the delusions of marriage and of adultery. Ophuls was never happier, nor for that matter was Danielle Darrieux.

It is not really surprising that Ophuls can still invest the cliché of Old Vienna with all the elegant raptures that Lubitsch, among so many, could never encompass. But to do it with so little ostensible elaboration denotes the true romantic artist. And this is not to demean the invaluable contributions of d'Eaubonne (décor) and Matras (camera).

To me *La Ronde* suggests a Mozart *Theme and Variations*, at once formal and gay, cynical and tender, romantic; and ruthless.



The raised set of the ship's deck during a take

A DAY IN THE

Carol Reed shoots

PHOTOGRAPHED BY



Reed rehearsing the scene

THIS WAS ONE of the last days in the life of *An Outcast of the Islands*, on which shooting began in Ceylon and ended on two stages at Shepperton. The choice of Conrad's novel may seem an unexpected departure for Reed but actually, he says, it is a project of many years' standing; he had originally intended to make it when working for Gainsborough. The story, besides, offers many possibilities for a director interested in character relationships. Its little colony of people on an island in the Indian Ocean, compounded of settlers, natives, birds of passage, beachcombers, and the varied flotsam thrown up by the sea, serves as rich starting point for adventure and intrigue.

Reed has assembled an impressive cast for his film: Ralph Richardson, Trevor Howard, Robert Morley, Wendy Hiller, George Coulouris, and, of course, Kerima, a half-French, half-Arab girl making her first film appearance. A characteristically enterprising piece of casting is that of A. V. Bramble, actor and director in the 20's, as the girl's father. The camerawork is by John Wilcox, who did second unit work on *The Third Man*, with which Reed was sufficiently impressed to appoint him director of photography on the new film.

Reed shoots on two stages simultaneously. He finds it a time-saving method, and not in the least technically daunting. This is not surprising: after a few minutes of watching him at work, the strongest impression is of his complete technical grasp of film-making. There is nothing obsessive or fussy about it, even though it is obsessed and particular; as if instinctively in command of the medium, he is able simultaneously to absorb and execute a wide range of details. He gives



LIFE OF A FILM

"An Outcast of the Islands"

DANIEL FARSON



Reed discusses a set-up with his cameraman, John Wilcox



Carol Reed before the take illustrated on the left

the impression that the shot he is about to take is already absolutely formed in his head, that the camera is a simple instrument, a button to be pressed, to carry out his conception, and thus he can manoeuvre his actors, attend to the human and dramatic elements of a scene, uninhibited (as he prepares it) by any other considerations.

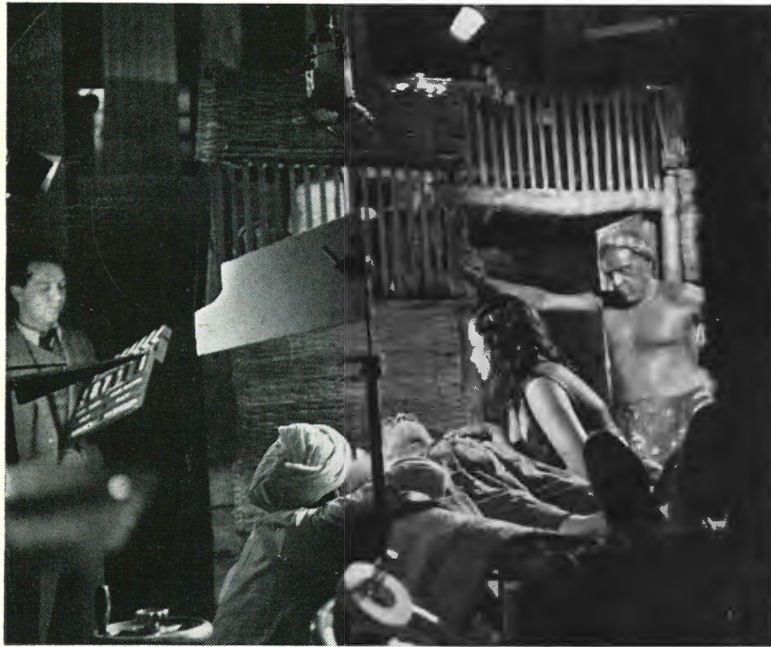
The two sets on which he was working this day were, on one stage, a small native hut; on the other, part of the deck of a ship (see the still at the top of the lefthand page), raised on a platform above floor level and backed by a large travelling matte. In the hut scene, Kerima stands by the bed of her father, who is dying: a procession of natives moves in and out. Into the little outlying room, Howard comes, speaks one line to Coulouris—"he tried to kill me!". Reed comes on to the set, looks through the camera, quickly fixes Coulouris' position and illustrates Howard's movements to him. His instructions to the native extras are translated by an assistant, who pushes them, uncomprehending but obedient, on and off the set to create the impression of perpetual ingress and egress. He has two rehearsals of the shot, and two takes; then he covers the scene with a closer shot—a principle on which he works a good deal of the time.

While the camera is being set up for the next shot, Reed goes across to the other stage, for a scene of Richardson striding the deck of his vessel at night. There is—characteristic of Reed's attention to detail—an expert on hand to check whether Richardson should give an order before



Some of the actors in "An Outcast of the Islands". Left to right, Trevor Howard in the studio restaurant: Kerima during a break in the shooting: George Coulouris meditates: Ralph Richardson during a rehearsal: and A. V. Bramble, film actor from 1915 onwards ("Tipperary", "The Wreck of the Birkenhead"), director in the 20's of "Wuthering Heights", "The Laughing Cavalier", and with Anthony Asquith, "Shooting Stars"





taking the helm himself, or vice versa.

In the next scene, back on the hut set, Reed's approach to the actor as raw material is in evidence. Its important elements are the actions of Kerima. At this stage, Kerima is more of a personality than an actress (she has had no previous professional experience), and here, one felt, was one of those performances being created by a director, an instrument being played upon and perfectly responding. Kerima has an unfamiliar, distinctive beauty, which will appear in the film, and a vivacity and humour that probably will not. She performs with a quick intelligence, and finds Reed "*tres gentil*".

Perhaps no British film has contained such a diversity of leading players for some time—since, in fact, *The Third Man*, when Reed employed the quiet naturalism of Cotten, the extravagance of Welles, the passivity of Valli, and a rather sombre, withdrawn Trevor Howard, and contrived that none played against the other, that no style annihilated another. Here he has the solitary, deliberate, slightly artificial style of Richardson; the relaxed natural playing of Howard; the tutored exoticism of Kerima: the lively, eruptive talent of Coulouris—to say nothing of Wendy Hiller and Robert Morley. It is from such a variety of elements that Reed likes to compose a film. In *The Third Man* he manipulated a strange group of characters through a post-war Vienna derelict, and with undertones of fantasy; here the setting will be more remote and exotic. There is, no doubt, something of the virtuoso's delight in this assortment, as well as the strong fascination that the contrast and variety of human behaviour exerts upon him.

The actors are aware of the special excitement that a Reed film can give in this way. Once a repertory actor himself, Reed's hold on his cast derives partly from the fact that he is a very good actor as well as director, that he can demonstrate anything he wants, down to some highly authentic-sounding improvisation of native cries. *An Outcast of the Islands* gives, too, chances that don't come so often to actors in films—certainly not to Howard, who has had too few parts in recent years worth his talent.

Sealed up in this day's work, at least, was a fragment of a film, where one could see a brilliantly accomplished and inventive talent in the concentration of activity—scriptless (he did not once consult the script while directing the scenes) and absorbed to such an extent that he gives the impression that nothing else exists except the film he is making. And so it seemed. It was a day not only of creation but of magical exclusion.

Top: Carol Reed rehearses Kerima for the scene by her father's death-bed.

Centre: a reverse angle view of the set during rehearsal.

Below: the shot as finally taken.

ACTING:

Sight and Sound

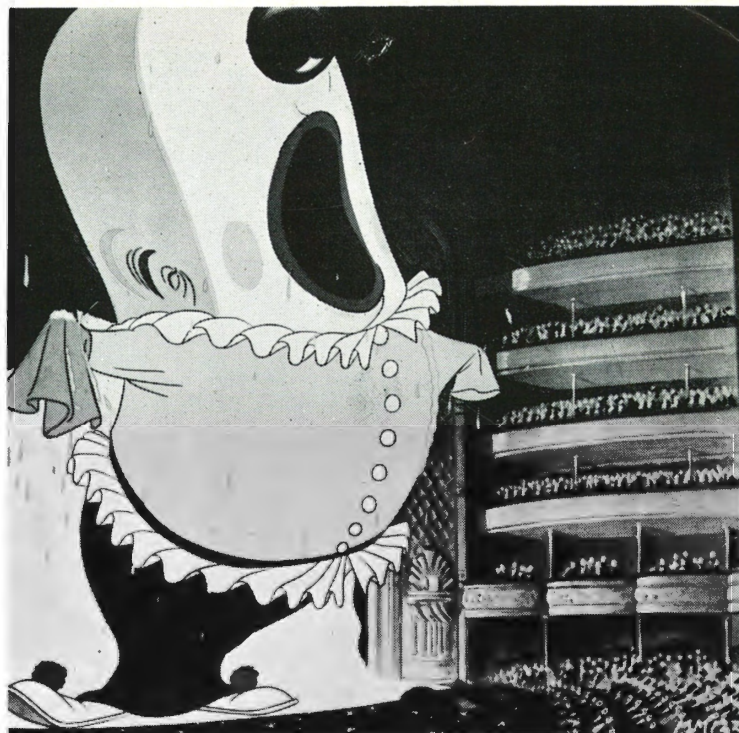
Philip Hope-Wallace

IF *The Tales of Hoffmann* does nothing else it surely forces us to face, not merely the music, in the most literal sense, but also to face a problem which has been more or less shelved since talkies came into existence: I mean the question of voice plus appearance which is posed by the talking screen of cinema—and of television, even more acutely. Do voice and “look” match each other? I daresay many people would think that in a general way it doesn’t very much matter—better if they do (‘an ensemble’ as we say in the haberdashery dept.) but not fatal if they don’t, like earrings worn with tweeds. Bad matching is, I think, very much more liable to happen in this country than in some other lands where voice is taken, quite rightly, for what it is; not just a communicator or a melodic instrument, but a *physical* expression of the personality, and—what is more—a secondary sexual attribute. One kind of person can no more have a voice of another sort than one kind of blood can coalesce with a blood of another group.

Dubbers generally seem to me to work as unscientifically in this respect as the most primitive surgeons of the dark ages. In ordinary dubbing, extremely little care seems to be taken to select the voice which will accord with the image. Usually it is done by some player who can be trusted to give a fairly near English equivalent of the *character* which the visual player is portraying (e.g. an *apache* character is dubbed by a cockney specialist). But what of the physical attributes of the visual player? Is any effort made to render by voice the visual compound of ‘actor *plus* character’? Very seldom.

An added complication is of course that seeing faces as close as we do in the cinema, we may reach the discouraging conclusion—most artistically aware persons are ruthlessly opposed to dubbing in any form—that an English face cannot be made to talk French or that an Italian face cannot be made to talk English. Or American for that matter—how would you dub Judy Holliday into English? It will always at best be a compromise. But let us, if possible, avoid the worst anomalies. Since, in one of the first talkies I ever saw (*Show Boat*), I heard Laura La Plante suddenly begin to sing in a heavy baritone, I have not encountered anything, in this line, quite so astonishing as Mr. Robert Helpmann in *The Tales of Hoffmann* traipsing about to the voice of Mr. Bruce Dargatzidis—as fine, rotund and chesty a baritone as ever came out of the police force. Hardly less horrifying was the pretty little ballerina, all spidery legs and tiny bosom, from whose half-closed lips issued the majestic, fruity, dramatic soprano of Mme. Marguerita Grandi. The effect of these two dubbings was, to anyone with an ear for voices, for voice types and for what the voice means (as a physical attribute) as shocking as anything I have ever encountered, and in its own way as funny as meeting an all-in wrestler with a girl’s voice or a bearded lady out for a walk.

There is also the question of loudness, a question much fogged by our sickening familiarity with the microphone. The size of a voice, and the carrying power of a voice (some-



The last word on dubbing—operatic dubbing, certainly—was perhaps said by Disney in “Make Mine Music”, the story of Willie the Whale who Wanted to Sing at the Opera. The shock of his resonant bass was even greater than that of Laura La Plante’s “heavy baritone”

thing different again) are as much attributes of the person as the timbre and the clef or register.

We are quite hardened, of course, to hearing Betty Grable let out notes which would lift Mme. Flagstad out of her armour, but the *truth*, actual as well as artistic, is that if you are Miss Grable’s shape rather than Mme. Flagstad’s you do *not* sound like that. But perhaps that battle is lost; the chief culprit in spreading the untruth has been the gramophone which since electrical recording has tended to make all voices seem about the same size.

With the coming of ‘stereophonic’ films—though I confess the examples I have heard sounded very much like ordinary sound tracks—we shall have further complications; for these films, by distributing the sound all round us and bawling into our right or left ear, as the case warrants, will surely force us to realise how far we have strayed from truth. Nearly all voices, speech level, on the cinema or television screen, come at us with undue loudness, undue, not because unnatural, but because after a certain point the ear fails to distinguish between *ff* and *fff*. For me the most dismaying feature of screened Offenbach was the insistence with which what I had hitherto regarded as ‘charming’ music was pumped under pressure into our ears; not merely the big scenes, which would have been perfectly fair, but even those connecting passages of recitative which, in the theatre, provide just the necessary relaxation of our attention. What ever else is now understood about the marriage of sight and sound on the screen, it seems to be obvious that all too little thought has been given the problem of *how we attend* to such a thing as opera; (or indeed poetic drama *vide* the *Hamlet* film). Is it not obvious that we do not attend with eye *and* ear at the same stretch *simultaneously*; but rather with both senses alternately keyed up and working in complementary fashion?

12 years of Judy Garland. Right, in London last month. Below, in "The Wizard of Oz", (1939), in "Meet Me in St. Louis" (1944), in "Easter Parade" with Astaire (1948), and "In the Good Old Summertime" (1949).



STAR TURN:

Judy Garland

WE DON'T EXPECT surprise at the stage appearances of film stars—not, in fact, much more than a physical confirmation of their existence. When we read news stories about them—and the star myth has led to an inextricable confusion between news and publicity—we accept them at something less than face value, and hardly look for any sign of them in the star's appearance. Judy Garland's recent visit to the London Palladium broke the rules: she looked a good deal older, and rather tired, she had lost the fascinatingly thin, intense look, and an unflattering costume emphasised that she had come very near to stoutness. Hardly surprising in someone who had not faced a live audience in 16 years, her stage technique was rough and uncertain. She took a firm grip on the microphone, removing her hands, like a cyclist's from the handlebars, for a few simple gestures. She adopted the fashionable casual technique—mopping her face with a handkerchief, taking off her shoes, collapsing on the accompanist's chair—which is pleasant, but always seems either over- or under-rehearsed. The technique showed the absence of a director: the personality was still authentic.

Judy Garland has never danced as well as Ginger Rogers or Vera-Ellen (at the Palladium she did not dance at all), and her singing voice is raucous and far from flexible. Yet she has always been able to make the Hayworths, Grables and Huttons look as if they had just stepped, new and shiny, off the assembly line. The trick is an extraordinary mixture of humour, vitality and sincerity of feeling—which makes the most indifferent songs sound as if they meant something—and an intriguing, expressive face. At the Palladium, the qualities of character were almost all that were left: startlingly, they were enough.

The Palladium act, compounded of sentiment and comedy, contained most of the old songs: the Trolley Song from *Meet Me in St. Louis*, "Easter Parade", "Get Happy" from her last film, *If You Feel Like Singing*, and of course "Over the Rainbow", in which the tricky stage lighting provided no help at all, but which has taken on that peculiar quality of a signature tune, and seems to have grown up with the star. It was gay, cheerful, and occasionally touching, both by contrast and by memory.

The act was greeted and punctuated by the roaring applause of what must surely be the kindest audience in the world. It was drawn, perhaps, by the attraction of seeing the star (any star) *in person*, as the advertisements insist: what it got was the star strangely divested of myth. And this is curious, for Judy Garland's career is an embodiment of almost all the legends. Born into vaudeville, forcing her way into the family act at the age of three, reborn nine years later on the M.G.M. lot; the success story continued when the child star of *Babes on Broadway* and the perennial *Wizard of Oz* managed to grow up without losing her natural charm and liveliness, and without changing her methods. She merely developed them. As the ideal teen-age girl in the nostalgically re-created family group of *Meet Me in St. Louis* she was, perhaps, at her most appealing; and she made two more particularly successful appearances under her husband's, Vincente Minnelli's

direction in *Under the Clock* and *The Pirate*. In the latter film she clowned (one of her most engaging talents) with Gene Kelly, as she did again with Astaire in *Easter Parade*.

But the success on the screen took its price. The star legend claims its victims, and the eager, starved, tense look which was part of the charm was clearly also the result of strain. Thus, after the endless succession of reported disagreements with her studio, the divorce from her husband, the divorce from the studio—with recriminations and suggestions that Hollywood was a kind of sophisticated salt-mine—she begins again in vaudeville, facing a live audience, but an audience drawn by the myth, the legend of the star. Stars, we know, are born, built, created, developed, or just plain "made": but even the simplest word admits the basic process of fabrication. What the Palladium audience got was a natural personality stripped of the whole apparatus of illusion that had surrounded it for years.

For there are stars and there are actors, people who combine both qualities or only one. In the cinema, personality is an essential ingredient of either. To be a star, an actor's personality needs certain attributes that seize the public imagination and taste—physical attraction of a not too unfamiliar kind, or personal magnetism gained through sex, wit, audacity, pathos, or some other exclusively stressed quality. The process of star building is the emphasis of this prime quality—through physical grooming, through choice of roles, choice of starring partners—and the elevation of it into what is called "glamour". Glamour, the magnified single personal attribute, is star quality.

Since physical attraction of one kind or another is fairly common, a number of stars never become particularly interesting personalities—just artificially inflated ones, achieving a precarious balance of individuality on account of the excitement they generate when wearing sweaters, exposing their thighs (or, in the case of men, their chests), demonstrating screen kisses, and so on. The question of acting ability need not arise at all, since the star principle, devoted to presenting a consistent personality on and off the screen, is the antithesis of the acting principle.

In the case of Judy Garland, the star personality was built up from a composite with more individual elements than is usual. She had the appeal of paradox—the slight figure combined with loud nervous energy—and the paradox, it is now plain, was something grafted on to her. We are born with soul and body combined, but stars may be required to make radical adjustments to one or the other; this process can, on the screen, create an impression of fantastic enlargement, and it can also be something too unnatural for anybody to sustain. Wilder and Brackett showed us what happened to a star of this kind when she got older in *Sunset Boulevard*. So, when the essential human-being breaks away and asserts itself, throws off the impossible strait-jacket, we should not be surprised to meet it on a simple human level. Perhaps the most striking point of the pictures of Judy Garland opposite is the resemblance of the 15-year-old child of *Wizard of Oz* to the 28-year-old Judy Garland in London last month.

UNFAIR TO EISENSTEIN?

In his article on Editing in the February issue of SIGHT & SOUND Karel Reisz said "it is curious that Eisenstein . . . has had so small a lasting influence on the practice of film-making", and went on to discuss present-day documentary films in this connection. The article has brought Eisenstein's supporters to the defence: we print comments by Miss Marie Seton and Mr. Lewis McLeod, and have asked Mr. Reisz to answer them.

Marie Seton

IT MAY BE INTERESTING to those who read Karel Reisz' article *Editing* to re-examine some of his contentions concerning Eisenstein's theories of "relational editing"—a phrase never used, so far as I know, by Eisenstein.

Mr. Reisz confines his discussion to *October* and *The General Line* leaving the impression that these films made in 1927 and 1929 respectively were the final development of Eisenstein's style of editing. In point of fact both films were purely experimental—steps leading to the unrealised film *An American Tragedy*, which dealt with the development of characters, and where "montage" was to be employed chiefly in one sequence for the purpose of conveying an "internal monologue", and the unfinished *Que Viva Mexico!*, the last of Eisenstein's "documentaries", but of an entirely different character from his earlier films.

Following these films were *Bezhin Meadow*, also unfinished, *Alexander Nevsky* which, as is well known, greatly influenced Laurence Olivier's conception of *Henry V*, and *Ivan the Terrible*.

Mr. Reisz' discussion of Eisenstein's methods is in no way applicable to either of the latter films, where Eisenstein's editing became much simpler for these "story-telling" pictures and where he was primarily concerned with audio-visual effects—the Battle on the Ice in *Nevsky* and the Coronation in *Ivan*.

Moreover, Mr. Reisz' contentions made in 1951 that *October* and *The General Line* have ceased to exert influence to-day seem to be torn out of the context of their time. The late 'twenties was an experimental period in all the arts, whereas the late 'forties and early 'fifties show little experimentation. Hence it is unlikely that the influence of such experimental films as Eisenstein's early ones would be obvious to-day. It is common for the work of experimental artists—let us cite for example El Greco—to lie as it were in abeyance in periods when conservatism in art is in the ascendancy and regain their influence only when another period of experimentation begins to flower.

Finally, it might be pointed out that Eisenstein's theories, which he wrote about at length in *The Film Sense* and *Film Form*, appear to be still undigested by many readers of these books, including not a few directors and editors.

Karel Reisz

The first part of Miss Seton's disagreement with what I wrote arises out of a misunderstanding. I discussed Eisenstein's methods of intellectual montage and how far they are relevant to the contemporary documentary director. I wrote of Eisenstein's silent films because it was in these that his montage of ideas experiments were developed. If I did not mention the sound films, it was precisely because, as Miss Seton herself points out, they are concerned with different problems. Clearly my remarks did not, and could not have, applied to

Ivan or Nevsky, and I must apologise if this was not made entirely clear.

Miss Seton's other point is more arguable. Whether Eisenstein's experiments will be taken up when "another period of experimentation begins to flower" is anybody's guess. I tried to suggest that they will not be and gave the reasons why I thought so. Miss Seton merely says that they will be—when film-makers become more adventurous. We'd better leave it at that.

Lewis McLeod

Karel Reisz' article on *Editing* provides ample substance for serious analytical and critical discussion.

Those of us who have enjoyed Ernest Lindgren's *The Art of the Film* will be amused at Mr. Reisz' opening remarks that Eisenstein has "had so small a lasting influence on the practice of film making". Several lines later we are told that "the contemporary director regards Eisenstein's constant cutting between physically unrelated images as an irrelevant conceit", and that "these methods are not suitable to the portrayal of characters".

This is obviously correct and indisputable.

But why put this particular part of his work (his silent period) under the microscope and generalise so widely? Does his *Nevsky* or his *Ivan the Terrible* suffer from this past mistake? On page 58 of his *Film Form* Eisenstein himself criticises this "unrelated imagery" of his own film *October*: "as soon as the film-maker loses sight of the inner dynamitisation of the subject, the means ossifies into lifeless literary symbolism and stylistic mannerisms . . . such hollow use of this are the church spires and hands playing harps". This essay is dated 1929! Isn't there a lesson here for T. S. Eliot? On this point, then, we are all in agreement.

Mr. Reisz, however, dwells on this aspect—why? Has his polemic any point or direction? It certainly has, and it becomes apparent in his further remarks, as we shall see. We can also fully appreciate and agree with Mr. Reisz' observation that Eisenstein's films "express ideas and the reaction of people to these ideas", and, a few lines later, that "his aim was to affect the spectator more directly". Confirmation of this is to be found in Eisenstein's writings, where he wisely recommends the earnest student to study Darwin ("the nature of Art is a conflict between natural existence and creative tendency") and the work of Pavlov on physiology ("human expression is a conflict between conditioned and unconditioned reflexes").

Again Mr. Reisz takes the obvious from *October*. He says that "no director to-day would dream of using Eisenstein's device of overlapping continuous shots, such as he has in the 'palace door' sequence". This is the second attempt to generalize on the particular extracted from its period (silent) and from the theoretical development it then represented. Continuing with his "discoveries" Mr. Reisz follows with "the surprising fact that the Eisenstein influence seems to have

come to an end, in the field of documentary". Why particularly documentary?

Readers and members of last year's Bangor film course will not find it "surprising"; indeed they will know precisely why documentary, notably in America to-day, has departed or subtly deviated from "films which express ideas and the reaction of people to these ideas". John Grierson said that he was "particularly bothered" about what is happening in documentary to-day: other documentary directors and editors appeared to agree with him.

We may take another field and ask ourselves why recent American books on social and industrial psychology have been so strongly permeated with psycho-analysis—whose basic characteristic is the minimisation of consciousness. The Answer is the same, both for the Cinema and for Psychology. What we are witnessing here, therefore, is Mr. Reisz' conscious or unconscious reflection not of a mere personal disbelief in Eisenstein's film technique, but of an anti-Eisenstein, i.e. Marxist, conception of culture.

Mr. Reisz praises the "innovation" of "to-day's documentary, which makes the commentary carry the message, and lets the picture illustrate the words", and finds tangible, fruitful results in Humphrey Jennings' last work *Family Portrait*. *Family Portrait*, he says, "is a challenge to the Eisenstein devotee. Jennings seems to have recognised that the proper medium for the expression of ideas is through words, and that the function of the visuals in a film essay of this kind was to strengthen and to illuminate obliquely rather than to express directly the intellectual contents of the film".

With all due respect and admiration for Jennings' experimental work in sound—*Listen to Britain* and *Fires Were Started*—I would advise all readers first to see, or rather to experience, *Family Portrait* and then to consider these words of Eisenstein: "one encounters in films individually fine shots but under these circumstances the value of the shot and its independent pictorial quality contradict one another. Out of tune with the montage idea and composition, they become aesthetic toys and aims in themselves. The better the shots, the closer the film comes to a disconnected assemblage of lovely pictures; a shop window, full of pretty but unrelated products, or an album of postcard views*". This essay is dated 1934.

To be certain that we are not misinterpreting Mr. Reisz, or reading into his article what was not intended, let us turn to an article which he wrote in *Sequence* on William Wyler. The same line of polemic, in favour of a "new form" of "filmed theatre" is clearly admitted. We know that in the early thirties the film purist's shallow argument was, in effect, that sound or dialogue destroyed the internationalism of the purely visual cinema. Mr. Reisz says of the film's fundamental element—motion—that "broad movement, so often held to be one of the essentials of genuine cinema is not, surely, an absolute necessity. If a director can sustain interest by other means, if he can evolve a method which uses the (necessarily more static) stage conventions and stage dialogue, without surrendering expressive pictorial values, he is surely entitled to do so. To call his work theatrical is then to recognise a style, rather than to imply weakness". Aye, those wee "ifs".

Remember Hitchcock's *Rope*—the exhausting ten-minute takes, the breathless super-smooth precision of the tracking. Would not Mr. Reisz' phrase "irrelevant conceit" be appropriate here? Eisenstein knew the Chinese proverb, "mistake or defeat is the mother of progress". Hitchcock's "new artistic form" was also discussed by him. In writing (1929) of

*"Film Language", in *Film Form*, page 111.

Abram Room's *Death Ship* he dismissed as "utterly unfilmic" the uncut dramatic shots 135 ft. in length. Mr. Reisz commits that all too common fault of throwing the baby out with the bath water. It is sad that such a deep well of practical-theoretical knowledge as Eisenstein's *Film Form* should be ignored or distorted as it is.

Stage dialogue, like the theatre itself, is not absolute or static. The dialogue of Ibsen or Shaw, by their choice of subject matter (i.e. social problems) is to that degree only more adaptable to the cinema than that of their predecessors of the non-social theatre. It was industry that determined the inevitable evolution from theatre to cinema: Eisenstein's personal biography and work proved this.

The expression of ideas through the spoken word is the essence of Theatre. The essence of the sound film is the "visual and aural montage or counterpoint", or the mutual interaction of conflict through the corresponding and relative selection of sight and sound, in accordance with the director's personal relationship to his subject matter. We have brief experiences of this from Dreyer's *Day of Wrath*—the horrid visual reality of the burning of the witch clashing with the sweet celestial voices of the choirboys. This counterpoint sharpens the impression, conveying the sense of hypocrisy and superstition. In Ivens' documentary *Indonesia Calling* there is brief emotional tension and suspense, with the increasing volume and speed of the ship's engine, beating like a heart, awaiting the decision of the scab crew not to assist the Dutch imperialists in supplying arms to suppress the liberating forces in Indonesia.

Are we all so sure that Eisenstein had so small a lasting influence on practical film making?

At the moment, it is sufficient to say that revisionism and diversionism appear in different shades and in various forms. "These departures cannot be attributed to accident, or to the mistakes of individuals or groups, or even to the influence of national characteristics and traditions. There must be radical causes in the economic system and in the character of the development of all capitalist countries, which constantly gives rise to these departures".

Eisenstein said: "shot and montage is the nerve of the cinema; to determine the nature of montage is to solve the specific problems of this most powerful artistic force for the development and enrichment of the human intellect. Such is the present and future task of the cinema, for the inevitably emerging New Era.

Karel Reisz

I confess that I find Mr. McLeod's arguments extremely difficult to follow. May I therefore attempt an answer point by point?

1. Like Mr. McLeod, I have read *The Art of the Film* but, for the life of me, do not see the joke.

2. Quoted in the way it is, the quotation from page 58 of Eisenstein's *Film Form* seems to me incomprehensible. I think it is unlikely that Mr. Eliot will find it useful.

3. Why particularly documentary? Simply because I happened to be writing about documentary films.

4. The significance of Mr. McLeod's little dig at psychology eludes me completely: I am baffled by the Answer (unspecified) which is "the same, both for the Cinema and for Psychology", though the capital "A" makes it sound a little sinister. And why we are "therefore" witnessing something about my personal subconscious is another mystery.

(continued on page 65)

SOVIET CINEMA'S CHANGE OF HEART

(An Assessment based on Soviet Sources)

H. H. Wollenberg

"YOU MUST ALWAYS remember that, to us, of all forms of art the film is the most significant".

This sentence coined by Lenin still forms the favourite motto of Soviet film publications. To us in the West, it may well serve as a reminder that, on the whole, those responsible for shaping public opinion and taste are still far from recognising the tremendous significance of the phenomenon of film, which the leader of the Communist revolution saw so clearly thirty years ago. When in the West will the cinema be accepted as "the most significant art form" of our age?

Lenin's dictum by no means remained a mere theory. Talented minds were soon to discover new artistic laws; they were developed in a number of films—Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* above all—which astonished the world. They represented an advance in film making which marked one of the most decisive phases in the history of the cinema.

Achievements of such significance, as the study of the history of all arts (and of human culture generally) has taught us, can only be accomplished through the impact and exchange of ideas upon the creative mind. Whether we ourselves profess any specific faith or not, the results will be works of art in the true and most ambitious meaning of the word: you need not be a Roman Catholic to be inspired by Raphael's "Sistina".

But a faith can degenerate into a dogma, an idea into a rigid ideology. There then remains little or no space for individual and genuinely creative inspiration. Lenin's old watchword may still be used as a motto but, turning from the past to the present Soviet cinema, we see that while its wording has been kept its meaning has changed. Artistic expression has ceased to be an end in itself; the artistic means are harnessed to the end of propaganda.

In any case, "to us" as Lenin said and his successors repeat, the film is the most significant medium. If we wish to understand something of the psychological atmosphere of Soviet Russia, we can study with advantage the current developments in the most important mass medium in the hands of Soviet rulers.

Here probably the most important recent event was a Conference held in Moscow at the end of last year. It was convened by the Soviet Film Ministry and attended not only by Russians but by leading representatives from other Eastern countries, including Dr. Maetzig, Eastern Germany's foremost producer-director. According to reports in Eastern journals the meeting must have been characteristic of the present trend whereby film policy, in the last resort, is determined not by the creative film makers but by a new generation of Soviet officials of proven reliability. They control long term planning in accordance with the propagandist requirements as determined by general Soviet policies. The purpose of the Conference was apparently to give the film makers their directives. Deputy-Minister Shitkin, who

clearly played the most prominent part, made it known that a Two-Years-Plan for all Soviet film activities had been drafted. Its preparation and execution were discussed in great detail by all the participants at a number of sessions. Twenty-six new feature films are lined up for release in 1951. This number does not include those films which will go on the floor this year, but will not be shown until 1952. The total output, quantitatively speaking, does not seem very ambitious as a target for a country of Russia's size.

More significant is M. Shitkin's more general advice to his audience. As for subject matter, he pointed out that within the framework of the Two-Years-Plan there will be "a constant effort towards improving the ideological-artistic standards" of films. The cinema will have to reflect "the high sense of moral responsibility of Soviet Man, the heroic feats of the creators of Communism".

Some titles of films now in production may illustrate the trend thus indicated: *The Warmongers* (director, L. Arnstam), *The Conscience of the World* (director, A. Room), *Farewell America* (director, Dovshenko) and new biographical films of the glorifying type such as *Przevalski*, *Dzershinski*, and *Admiral Ushakov*. In addition to feature production, incidentally, documentary film making will be strongly emphasised.

Characteristic of the methods employed in Soviet film exploitation is a booklet published by "Sovexportfilm", Moscow. Its very title, *Films of Peace*, with the sub-title *The Soviet Film in its Struggle for Peace*, shows the co-ordination of film publicity with the familiar slogans used by Soviet propaganda in international politics. In the preface, reference is made to the Stockholm Peace Appeal and it is pointed out that "the passionate support of the Soviet Film for the cause of justice and freedom, its determined attitude against imperialistic war, is one of its most essential characteristics. The most important purpose of the Soviet film is to make films which serve peace and the good of mankind".

Turning from the abstract to the concrete, the films announced in the booklet are classified in four categories:—

(i) **Against Servitude and Suppression;** including such films as *Tchapaiev* and *The Oath*.

(ii) **Against Racial Hatred and Aggression;** including *The Battle of Stalingrad*, *The Fall of Berlin*, and *The Secret Mission*.

(iii) **For Progress and Humanity;** including *Kuban Cossacks*, *Michurin*.

(iv) **For Friendship Amongst all Nations;** including *The Russian Question*, *Encounter on the Elbe*, *Reunited*, and *They Have a Homeland*.

The classification of some of these films, which one happens to know, under these headings appears somewhat surprising.

More revealing, in a far deeper sense, is a recent essay by

no less a personality than V. Pudovkin. Both as a creative film maker and as a theorist Pudovkin is—notwithstanding all ideological differences—highly esteemed all over the world; his place is second only to Eisenstein. The essay “On the Question of Socialist Realism in Film Art”, published under his name and that of E. Smirnova, seems the most authentic and up-to-date interpretation of the Soviet cinema from its early classic period to the present day. “Before the rise of the Soviet film” it points out, “the people in films such as *Cabiria* and *Intolerance* appeared like a mass without physiognomy. Crowds meant nothing but decoration. In contrast, such films as *Battleship Potemkin* and *Mother* made the revolutionary people the hero”. Later on, while the presentation of the masses remained the very essence of film art, there came those productions, made between 1934 and 1939, in which the mass theme was integrated with the revolutionary individual as hero. *Tchapajev* and the Gorki Trilogy are quoted as examples. By the recent war this trend received new impetus.

The film, destined for the millions, presents at the same time the image of those millions. However, beside the image of the revolutionary mass, the figure of the individual, the *positive hero* emerges on the screen. His features distinctly differ from those of the bourgeois film hero.

Note this emergence of the “positive hero”, for it evidently defines the turning point in Soviet film making.

The positive hero is the shrewder man, of greater foresight of forthcoming events, of clearer insight of the common cause, than the rest. His is the part of a leader, an organiser and inspirer of the masses. His life, his heroic actions, set the example for the actions of the many. And this positive image grows from film to film, it becomes ever more perfect and rich. Who, however, is this Soviet positive hero? Some superman, some “chosen” man, some lonely genius? No, he is one of the millions, a front line fighter of the people’s army, and just thereon rests his strength.

Tchiaurelli’s *The Oath* is quoted as an outstanding example, and “only by the impersonation of Stalin on the screen, the positive hero in his cinematic representation achieved his highest form” runs the caption to the corresponding film still.

In point of fact nationalism in its extreme form is a prominent feature not only of those large war pictures featuring Stalin such as *The Oath*, the *Stalingrad* and *Berlin* films; nationalistic indoctrination is no less the clear purpose of that still current series of biographical films which teach Soviet audiences that almost every human invention, radio telegraphy, aviation and so forth, originated from Russia.

This aspect, which presents so great a contrast with the earlier Russian production, has not been overlooked in Pudovkin’s essay. “One of the essential features of Soviet cinematography is its national colouring. Each prominent Soviet film, notwithstanding its international significance, is deeply national”. The following formula is added: “Soviet film art is national as regards the form, but socialist as regards the contents”. This is a somewhat unsatisfactory explanation for such scenes as that at the climax of *The Fall of Berlin* when the Russian girl heroine, after all that she has gone through, reacts to the end of the war and of her struggle by uttering some enthusiastic slogan in praise of Stalin. Is there a girl in the world who would react in this way, at this moment? This is one of the innumerable instances of nationalist propaganda, unreal and unconvincing, the “socialist content” of which one finds it hard to discover.

Most revealing of the radical change which has taken place in the Russian cinema, however, is another paragraph in Pudovkin’s essay. Here we find beneath the surface the real clue to present Soviet film policy.



Kind Father

A notable feature of several recent Russian films is the impersonation of famous living political figures, particularly Stalin (above) who makes a succession of God-like appearances. The physical resemblances are often uncannily lifelike, with fairly subtle distortions to emphasise villains (Churchill, in *The Fall of Berlin*, below) and idealise heroes—Stalin, whose expression in *The Battle of Stalingrad*, above, is characteristic.

Both these films are massive three-hour reconstructions of actual events: battle scenes alternate with the conference tables, where British—more specifically, Churchill’s—reluctance to open a second front is frequently stressed. Where Stalin is personified as gentle, unruffled and wise, Churchill’s face and manner are made cleverly gross, and, with the incessant cigar, he becomes a figure of vague menace. The general effect of these sequences is of a slightly animated room in Madame Tussaud’s.

Anti-Churchill interjections occur in other Soviet films, even in the re-edited version of Pudovkin’s famous silent *Storm Over Asia* (1928), to which post-synchronised dialogue, music and natural effects have been added, the character of a grasping European fur-trader turned into an American, and Churchill’s responsibility for British imperialism in China “exposed” in an aside.

Wicked Uncle





Nazis

The Fall of Berlin gives us reconstructed street fighting scenes, and lifelike impersonations of Hitler, Goering, Goebbels and others in rather more animated conference at the Chancellery. Hitler's marriage to Eva Braun (left) provides a piquant interlude, and his outbursts of rage and madness in front of high Nazi officials, chiefs of staff, and representatives from Spain, Japan and The Vatican, are contrasted with the serene wisdom of Stalin at Yalta. Stalin is previously seen in a prologue which takes place before the German invasion of Russia: he congratulates a Stakhanovite on breaking his own record in steel output, and brings him romance with a local schoolteacher, Natasha. After the fall of Berlin, Natasha and her Stakhanovite are reunited, go to the airport to meet Stalin, and she embraces him.

The aesthetics of Socialist Realism in the cinema have developed in the course of many years. There were numerous *creative errors, formalistic experiments*. It is no secret that, after the films *Battleship Potemkin* and *Mother* which formed the basis of Soviet screen art, the Soviet film makers, including Eisenstein, Kuleshov, Kosinzev, Pudovkin, Trauberg, and some others, enthusiastically took to the "theory" of typification which negated the actor, and to montage experiments which destroyed the subject, the pictorial value, and the action in films. It took quite a time until the Soviet masters had got rid of these mistakes.

In other words, just the experiments and achievements which won the early Soviet cinema admiration all over the world, and to which Pudovkin himself made so noteworthy a contribution, are nothing but errors of the past: a remarkable confession. Or has this confession, this self-accusation, been written to please those who determine the policy of the day?

A hint may be found in the next paragraph: "Socialist Realism . . . developed by struggling with Formalism, Empiricism and the remnants of the "Theories" of montage and typifying; by struggling for a deeply truthful and genuinely dramatic ideal art".

The implication of these sentences may mean a deep disappointment to many serious friends and students of the art and history of the cinema. They are corroborated, however, by the present Soviet production. We may even be grateful to Pudovkin for providing such an invaluable interpretation of Deputy-Minister Shitkin's promise of "a constant effort towards improving the ideological-artistic standards".

Americans

The Secret Mission, made last year, presents a group of vicious Americans as maniacal in their way as Hitler and his colleagues in The Fall of Berlin. The action takes place in the last months of the war, and tells of a plan—apparently instigated by Truman, and permitted by an ailing Roosevelt—to make Russia and Germany finish the war together and destroy each other. The plan is backed, naturally, by the unscrupulous American businessmen and financiers seen in this picture; but it is foiled. . . . See instalment on next page.



Heroes and Heroines

Above, right, the next instalment, as promised, of *The Secret Mission*. A Soviet girl disguises herself as an S.S. woman, and succeeds in inveigling information about the plan from a G.I. involved in it. This, in fact, was her secret mission.



Centre, right, Pudovkin's latest film *Zhukovsky*, a solemn biography of the Soviet aeronautical pioneer, whose plans are sold by an adventurer to other pioneers in Europe, who are thus enabled to steal his thunder. This scene shows Zhukovsky inventing. Admirers of Pudovkin will find little in the film to remind them of one of the great directors of 20 years ago.



Workers with a ready smile in *Liberated China*, a documentary account in colour made a few months ago by Gerasimov, who has directed such notable films as *The New Teacher* and *Young Guard*. This is a detailed, factual record of the communisation of a country, with the kind of scenes one might expect: hundreds of people are seen applauding the news of a pact between Mao Tse-tung and Stalin, hundreds of workers hew the earth while hammer and sickle banners float in the wind, hundreds of people enjoy a "people's opera", in which a peasant girl enslaved for many years is at last able to see her overlord overthrown, and join in the kicking, scores of children sit in a classroom at the end of which hangs a portrait of Mao Tse-tung, and—the famous symbol of well-being—there are new tractors everywhere.



Left: "The First S.O.S." follows the dramatic pattern of "Zhukovsky". It tells of a pioneer in Soviet telegraphy, again not universally recognised as the forerunner in his field because his secrets were sold by an Italian spy—standing guiltily with a moustache in this picture—to Marconi.



The Steps of Age

INDEPENDENCE

Last January we gave news and pictures under this heading of new films by de Sica, Paul Rotha and Gian-Carlo Menotti. Now two films recently completed in America—on a smaller scale, but of notable enterprise—give further evidence of individual film-makers finding freedom to experiment.

The Steps of Age (above) is a film about old age, focusing on the old people in a town in South Carolina. It is directed by Ben Maddow, the scenarist of *Intruder in the Dust* and John Huston's collaborator on the script of *The Asphalt Jungle*. It was produced—for the National Committee for Mental Hygiene and the State of South Carolina—by Helen Levitt, of Film Documents Inc., the same company that made *The Quiet One*, inexplicably not yet shown over here.

The Knife-Thrower is a 20-minute film made independently in New York, supervised by Herman G. Weinberg and directed by Maxwell Weinberg. It is an adaptation (by Eric Arthur) of Maupassant's story "The Artist", which describes an uncomfortable and rather eerie emotional triangle between the husband and wife in a knife-throwing act, and a magician in the same show. The players are David Kurlan (knife-thrower), Nikki Green (his wife) and Mel Roberts (the magician). In this case experiment has been commercially rewarded, for the film has been bought for distribution by Warner Bros. in the autumn.



The

Knife

Thrower



REPORT ON ZONK

Norman F. Spurr

An account of the reactions of an African urban and rural audience to the entertainment film ZONK

Zonk WAS PRODUCED in South Africa by African Film Productions Ltd., for showing to African audiences in the mining compounds on the Rand and elsewhere. It is modelled on the lines of the Warner Bros. Vitagraph Variety 'shorts', but in contrast to their 11 minute running time, *Zonk* runs for some 70 minutes. Most of the artists taking part are well-known names in the African entertainment world, and the cast is all-African. The film is fully synchronised, and is a collection of separate turns linked by means of a compere-announcer. The language used is English, with the exception of half of the announcement, which is in some African tongue that we have been unable to identify.

The following brief description of several of the items will assist in making the reactions of the two audiences under observation more intelligible.

1. A cradle song.
2. Two bass solos. One of them *Deep River*, the other title escaped us. Both were designed to show off rather a fine bass voice, which in the second song, which will be referred to as the *Hut Song* because of the painted backcloth, was unable to hold the note with exactitude.
3. A group of three action songs performed by the male members of the cast, which for the lack of a better title we will call *Wa-Wa*; *Squeeze Me*, and *Me Mammy and Me Pappy*.
4. The Manhattan Stars singing in close harmony a very rhythmic number.
5. A dance performed in rubber boots, and set in a hotel dining-room by the docks.
6. The hit number of the show *The Girl on the Cover of Zonk* which featured two singers. One, dressed in a white brocade material, opened the song, which then switched to a new 'blues' discovery who was tall and thin, and did a kind of jive.
7. The band which featured a jitterbug session.
8. The Finale which again starred the 'blues' singer.
9. A solo song and tap dance with top hat and cane, called *Truckin*.

Difficulty was experienced in following the English, which explains why the items have not been named with greater accuracy.

Two audiences were used for the investigation. The first was the normal audience which attends the Welfare Centre's Alexandra Hall in the African quarter of Dar-es-Salaam. The audience is composed of the illiterate and half-literate Swahili speaking urban African, with a sprinkling of English speaking people. They are used to seeing films, both at the commercial cinema and in the Alexandra Hall. For many months the Films Officer, P.R.O., has been giving weekly programmes of a miscellaneous character, but either directly instructional, as in

the case of the majority of the Colonial Film Unit films, or informational where C.O.I. films have been used.

There is no question that the film was a great success at the Alexandra Hall. This was revealed by the applause which greeted most of the items, the delighted and absorbed look on the faces of spectators, and the excited chatter between some of the items. Three of the items caused so much excited comment that the compere was drowned by the noise. These were the 'Boots' dance, the top hat and cane number called *Truckin*, and the jitterbug sequence. One woman called out excitedly 'I am enjoying this very much'. A man during the 'Boots' dance was overheard to say 'They don't expect to die' (i.e. they're happy). Another man in making reference to where the film was made said, 'If you get there you can't (never wish to) get back'.

All the dance numbers pleased, and there was appreciation of the standard, revealed by such remarks as 'They are well trained in dancing', but despite the appreciation of the modern techniques one man said of the group of action songs, with their shuffling dance, 'That's what we like, it's pure African'. He spoke in English. There appears to be a hint of regret in the following remark made during the jitterbug sequence: 'We can't dance that way in Dar-es-Salaam'. Whether 'Can't' was used in the sense of not having the skill, or not being allowed, must remain obscure.

In the 'Boots' sequence, one of the men dressed up as a woman, and this caused considerable comment and confusion. When shown in long shot one man was sure that it wasn't a real man, and then when the camera picked out the impersonator in close up, he said 'No, I'm sure now that's a real lady!'

The Girl on the Cover of Zonk caused one girl to remark 'There must be marvellously tall women in that country!'

Some items did not go down as well as others. Surprisingly, the *Cradle Song*, although well sung, failed to register and obtained very slight and perfunctory applause. Love, animals, and children are supposed to be fool-proof in audience appeal. The African bass was another failure especially in his second song (*The Hut Song*). An old man cried out during this number 'Stop him, take him away, we don't want him.' A more sympathetic listener said: 'What's he saying, it must be something very sad and interesting if we could hear'.

One argument heard between two men revolved round the question of whether the artists were Africans. One man said they were American negroes, and the other replied grudgingly 'Maybe, but we shouldn't develop this way'. This last comment was the only dissentient voice overheard.

The observer posted at the gate to listen to the crowd's remarks as they went out, said that the general impression on the audience was that the picture was the most encouraging example of the advancement of the African. There was modern music, there was no European supervision, and it was an all-African production.

The second audience whose reactions were investigated was a rural one in a village some 60 miles from Dar-es-Salaam.

The show was in the open air and the acoustic difficulties met with in the Alexandra Hall were absent, and the sound quality much better.

The villagers at Msangia had seen few films, and this was the first visit of the Mobile Cinema Van. This meant that some of the older members of the audience might not have seen a film and certainly not a 'talkie'. This explains the reason why a woman hurriedly rose from her seat on the ground and started to run away when *Zonk* first came on the screen. Talking shadows were too much for her. She was persuaded to return.

As part of the test was to see reactions to two Colonial Film Unit films, *Pamba*, made in Uganda, and *Watoto Wa Leo* made in Tanganyika, only the second part of *Zonk* was screened. Some of the youngsters had seen these two educational films at Maneromango, a village six miles away, the previous evening. It is unwise to run a film show in a rural area much longer than an hour and a quarter because the people like to be within the safety of their homes before it gets too late. This was illustrated by several people getting up and leaving before the show was ended, for despite the attractions of *Zonk*, they replied, when asked why they were going, that they wanted to get home, which was some distance away, before the wild animals started to prowl.

In order to try and clear up any misunderstanding at the start, *Zonk* was introduced by a brief announcement to the effect that the film had been made in South Africa, by Africans and for the entertainment of Africans. Despite this every observer reported that he overheard people remarking 'These are Baganda', and one person was so sure, that when the announcer appeared, he said 'This is a Muganda'.

The most surprising reaction was the almost complete absence of chatter. Compared with the reception to *Pamba* and *Watoto*, there was almost silence. This suggested at first glance that the film was not being followed in the sense that even visually it made no sense, or that it was not liked. Nothing was further from the truth. All observers reported that the film not only caused amazement at the progress of the African, but that it was understood within the limitations of an English sound track, and delighted the audience. The reason given for the comparative silence was that the audience, because they did not understand the words, were unwilling to commit a 'faux pas' and preferred to be silent than laugh in the wrong place.

Once again the bass singer failed to hold interest: 'Close him (shut him up), we're tired of him' was one comment—'He's no good'. Someone replied more charitably: 'It's all right, he's one of the members, let him be proud of what he's doing'.

As with the previous audience, the fat man doing the jitterbug brought forth resounding laughter. At this point I asked the English-speaking projectionist, whose face was enraptured, and who started when I spoke to him: 'Would you like a girl to dance with you like that' and got the equivalent of 'Not 'arf'.

There was only one case of identification, where the leading dancer in the 'Boots' dance sequence does a few steps and then sits down. His friends cry to him to go on, and in this cry the audience joined. This item was the only one that brought any chatter comparable with that at Alexandra Hall. In contrast to this, the dance in the top hat and with the cane, called *Truckin*, hardly brought forth any response, but someone was overheard to say: 'He's an expert dancer'. Also one man said of the 'Boots' dance 'We dance like that in this District'. This refers to the slapping of the feet and clapping of the hands. And when the first solo dancer went into his routine: 'He's a Luo'. These are, apparently, a tribe well known for their dancing.

Once again there was dispute as to whether the man was a woman, in the 'Boots' sequence, and again in *The Girl on the Cover of Zonk*. Many people realised that the girl who first sang the song and who was dressed in a white brocaded material, was an African, but in the finale they were not sure if it was the same girl or a European dressed up. In this number, where the tall, thin 'blues' singer dances and sings, a woman said: 'She is careless (of her character?), I wouldn't do such a thing in front of men'.

In both experiments there was an overwhelming liking for the film, and it is probably true to say that if all items had been in Swahili, the film would have almost created a riot. Only one person was heard to refer to previous filmgoing, and that was at Alexandra Hall, as he was leaving: 'What do they want to give us films on the feeding of pigs and such like, this is what we want'.

The investigation was made possible by the co-operation of the P.R.O. Film Section in the case of the urban show, and of the Welfare Department in the case of the rural screening.

Book Reviews

THE FUTURE OF BRITISH FILMS, by Richard Winnington and Nicholas Davenport. (*The News Chronicle*, 1/-)

TO WRITE A BALANCED history of the British film industry, and to present all the factors which must be taken into account in arriving at anything but an emotional solution of the industry's problems, is a hard enough task to attempt within the covers of a single book. To attempt it within the two dozen pages of "The Future of British Films" is a Procrustean labour of some difficulty even for two film writers of the calibre of Mr. Winnington and Mr. Davenport. The pamphlet has been prepared by the *News Chronicle* in co-operation with the Council for Education in World Citizenship to stimulate debate on the subject among educational groups. Bearing in mind the audience for which the pamphlet is intended and the difficulties involved in writing it, I still cannot help feeling that it would have more value if the facts had been presented more prosaically, and with less special pleading.

After giving the facts as they see them, the authors join issue on possible solutions. The argument centres on Government intervention in the affairs of the industry. Both agree on "the necessity for State legislation to prevent restrictive monopoly practices", but from there on there is a difference of opinion. Mr. Davenport criticises, with less severity than usual, the National Film Finance Corporation. He returns again to the British Lion loan which always seems to fascinate him, perhaps because he was himself a member of the Organising Committee and, for a time, of the National Film Finance Company which conducted the negotiations and made the original loan to this group.

Mr. Winnington favours the separation of both exhibition and renting from production. This may be desirable, but I cannot agree with him that "on the facts given, a fairly unanswerable case has been made out" for such a separation. He also supports a Fourth Circuit, possibly operated by the State.

Whether one can agree with all that is said in the pamphlet or not, it fulfils its purpose, and should stimulate discussion.

DUNCAN CROW

CINEMA 1951, edited by Roger Manvell and R. K. Neilson Baxter. (*Penguin Books* 2/6)

THIS IS THE SECOND ISSUE of the annual publication which takes the place of the *Penguin Film Review*. It is no longer tied to topical reviews and discussions, already a little yellowed and old fashioned by the time they are on the stalls. It has cut out the undigested statistics, often presented without any relevance to the artistic qualities of the films analysed; now a volume of essays on the film, it has great possibilities.

Cinema 1951 does not, still, come up to the level that its best features might lead one to expect. The stills are not very imaginatively chosen and most of them look, as Benchley said on a famous occasion, "as though they were etched on bread". Forty-eight pages are taken up with a rather inconclusive radio script by Roger Manvell and Thorold Dickinson, which describes what might have occurred during the making of a novel by Turgenev. There is little new information about film making in the script, and the reader can't help feeling "So what? It didn't really happen". Many of the little human touches which were probably effective on the air ("What a comfort you are to us, Roger! It is Roger, isn't it?" "Yes, indeed it is! Thank you very much".) sound rather Children's Hourish in print. Alexander Knox's subject "Acting and Behaving" is an extremely important one, and Philip Hope-Wallace promised to devote himself to it in SIGHT AND SOUND, though he never really got down to the details. Knox, too, has some stimulating generalisations to offer, but his examples are rather frightening: "The performance which more nearly touched the quality of the Keans and the Duses than most, was given by Barry Fitzgerald in *Going My Way*".

The most valuable article in the issue is by Henri Storck and P. E. Sales-Gomes on the making of *Zéro de Conduite*. This gives an admirable combination of personal detail and scholarly notes, and throws a great deal of much needed light on this extraordinary cineast who was given "one for trying" by Miss Lejeune. The quality of the rest of the volume is in the No Man's Land between these two levels. Nothing one can put a finger on to complain about; just impeccable competence and flat common sense. Karel Reisz writes about the effect of the Showman Producer, Basil Wright picks *Orphée* as the film of the year, James Monahan *On The Town*, Catherine de la Roche *Les Parents Terribles*. Even Gavin Lambert's choice of *Yellow Ribbon* no longer infuriates those of us who do not worship Our Ford with the fashionable fervour. On the whole, the mixture as before, only a little richer.

Perhaps the most startling remark is made in the preface and, backed by no facts, it stands out as a challenge to reviewers. "Already the film has been used as a bargaining weapon in the negotiation of trade agreements with the United States and the application of Marshall Aid, to the extent that, for instance, the French industry is hamstrung, Swedish production is on the point of ceasing, and the British producers are facing an acute financial crisis." Stated thus baldly, this assertion takes some swallowing, and certainly provides a useful alibi for the British film industry. If the editors have proof they should provide it as soon as possible. Surely all European films cannot be allowed to become *Jour se lèves*.

ALAN BRIEN.

TELEVISION

LAST MONTH I MADE some adverse, but I believe just, comment on the influence of sound broadcasting on certain aspects of television production; this month I would like to raise the matter of another television problem which may in some measure help to redress the balance.

I cannot quote a figure for the percentage of music broadcast by the B.B.C. in its ordinary radio programmes, but it must be very high. Conversely, the amount of music which is televised, for its own sake, is extremely small. The reason is evident enough: pure music is not visual. Music on television is therefore usually ancillary, an accompaniment to ballet or drama or film, or sometimes as a part of opera (although operas are too expensive for frequent production). When music is televised for its own sake it is usually in small doses of fifteen or twenty minutes, with attention focused on the individual performer, so as to obtain satisfying close shots for the small screen. It appears to be assumed, perhaps rightly, that the broadcast of orchestral or chamber music for any length of time is something the television audience would not stand for.

This may be a temporary difficulty only, created both by the present small screen and by the limited programme time, but if it should be inherent and permanent, it is difficult to see what the solution may be. A continuous shot of the full orchestra is certainly very dull; on the other hand, for cameras to weave fancifully amongst the players can be even worse, by distracting attention from the music altogether. Does all this mean that the B.B.C. will broadcast less and less pure music as we move into the television age? That would be most regrettable. Or does it mean that sound and television will finally settle down happily side by side, so that at certain times it will be possible to switch one's set on and hear sound only, with a blank screen, and at other times receive vision? This perhaps is the more likely and indeed it is already enjoyed in some measure by those who have combined receivers.

In the meantime, one must not fail to observe, there is one producer in B.B.C. Television who steadfastly refuses to be daunted by any of these considerations, and who appears to have devoted himself for the time being to the single task of making televised music interesting to watch: I refer, of course, to Christian Simpson. And, as if to refute all that I have said here about televised music, I have to confess that I often find his all-too-rare programmes are among the most fascinating and exciting of television experiences. It is not that his efforts are always completely successful, but at least he has accepted the challenge of the television medium, and accepted it in its most formidable form.

Three characteristics distinguish Simpson's work. The first is his evident understanding of the music. If he is showing a straight piano solo, for example, one has the sense that the score has been most carefully studied, and that every camera angle and change of camera position has been worked out as part of an interpretative plan. The result is a sense of sureness and of purpose, an absence of fussiness and uncertainty. When the visual subject is an orchestra, the positions of conductor and players are arranged with the same planning eye, to allow the cameras to obtain precisely the effects he wants.

His second characteristic is studied care for continuity. He obviously goes to considerable pains to ensure that the

displacement of a shot by its successor is visually as well as logically justified. In a recent programme of the cabaret singer Viera, for instance, the camera moved slowly into the sadly-plucked guitar until the round opening in it wholly filled the screen; this dissolved into the circular arch of a barred window from which the camera slowly drew back, to bring in Viera in the foreground. At the end of the song the whole movement was reversed to bring us back to the guitar again. To the film student, this device will not seem exceptional, but one has to remember that all this is being done with a live medium, not by the joining of film-lengths, and it is rarely seen in television; a device also has to be judged in its context, and this one was most effective.

Thirdly, and not least, Christian Simpson has imagination. He likes, for example, to play with the possibilities of a device which intrigued Georges Méliès, and used to be common in silent films, that of double exposure. A distant shot of one group of dancers, for instance, is superimposed on a closer shot of another, so that lifesized ballerinas appear to have miniature replicas of themselves dancing, as it were, on their outstretched hands. Or in a concerto the close-up of the solo instrumentalist's fingers is superimposed on a shot of the full orchestra.

In his most recent programme (as I write) the camera turned from a pianist playing Debussy's *Voiles* to the folds of the window curtain blown gently by the breeze, and it changed to gossamer as the dimly lit form of a dancer was superimposed on it. In the same programme, a close-up showed both the pianist's hands and their reflection in the woodwork of the piano. And suddenly the reflected image assumed a life of its own, the two "reflected" hands moved up and away into the darkness above the piano and performed an interpretative dance called *The Conquest*, in which the subtle, gentle right hand finally subdued the rigid, threatening, clawing left hand, and became one with it. We were subsequently informed that this movement had been suggested by Dürer's picture of hands in prayer, but it has been done before in film, of course, notably in France in the silent study by Stella Simon and Miclos Bardsy (*Les Mains*) which the Film Society showed in 1930.

These brief indications of the effects which Christian Simpson obtains may perhaps suggest how dangerously near to the precious, the gauche and the trite he treads. Sometimes his effects come off, and sometimes they do not, but the proportion of his successes, when one takes account of his difficulties, is high. He is television's nearest equivalent to the cinema's Norman MacLaren, but unlike MacLaren he has to work with real space and real time and living figures, and impose a pattern on them solely by the skilful arrangement and interchange of his camera "eyes". Whether he is ever likely to solve the problem of televised music I very much doubt, but it is a sure instinct which holds him to musical form, and for one viewer at least his work is a refreshing oasis in the desert of more pedestrian and haphazard forms of presentation.

ERNEST LINDGREN

CORRESPONDENCE

"A Walk in the Sun"

The Editor, SIGHT AND SOUND

Sir,—I visited the Plaza Cinema during the first week of the run of Milestone's *A Walk in the Sun* just over a month ago. This week,

I went to the local A.B.C. circuit cinema to see the film again, now shown with *The Naked Heart* as a supporting film. I noticed no difference in the two copies.

On the same evening that I visited the film for the second time, I started to read the Harry Brown novel which, as many of your readers will know, contains nearly all the material used in Rossen's shooting script, and immediately was struck by my familiarity with at least four longish passages which I knew I had not seen that afternoon. The copy had, I now realised, been severely cut in at least four places—I checked this by comparing notes with my companion who was seeing the film for the first time.

The material, in each case I was able to spot, is cut from the dialogue of the men on their long march, and these cuts have the effect of either eliminating, or at least seriously damaging, several of the minor tensions which go a long way towards making this study of men at war the remarkable achievement it is.

The questions that I feel need answering are—at what stage were these cuts made? Is there a special copy for the West End? Or were the cuts made by the distributor, who perhaps insisted on them as the price for general release? Or by the local cinema? And is the practice a common one? I imagine that many cinemagoers would like to know.

Yours faithfully,

RICHARD BEBB.

73, Lordship Road, London, N.16.

Cuts like those made in A Walk in the Sun are made in films which are shown in the West End as first features but, for various reasons, are only able to obtain a general release as second features. They are made by the distributors to fit the time limit of the double bill. The practice is a fairly common one. Many British war-time films, for instance, are reissued occasionally as second features; a number of these—Life and Death of Colonel Blimp, Demi-Paradise, etc.—have been quite substantially cut. We agree that this is a deplorable habit.

"The Miracle"

The Editor, SIGHT AND SOUND

Sir,—With reference to your remarks about the banning of *The Miracle* in America (April issue)—is the Christian to be forbidden in the name of freedom to take action against a film which concerns itself with religion in an offensive manner? If so, the Christian is penalised, whilst the atheist remains free to attack Christianity without fear of reprisal.

The heirs of the Protestant-Liberal tradition in this country misunderstand the Catholic position in this matter. We do not hold, as you do, that a man is free to say anything he pleases about any subject whatever. Liberty is not licence. Therefore, since it is a matter of conscience with us that there are definite things a man shall NOT say, why, in the name of freedom of conscience, should we not act on our belief? Not to do so would be either cowardice or apathy.

Personally I do not entirely agree with the American Catholics about *The Miracle*, but given the uncomplicated, unsubtle American mind, no one ought to be surprised at their reaction. To me the film seemed honest, in a too intense Italian way, but it was an appalling error of taste. Rossellini is obviously interested in the deeper spiritual problems, but he blunders more often than not, and this was a major blunder. The great theme of the Scapegoat, which comes so near to the central Mystery of the Faith, needs a surer touch than his; since this was his theme, there was no need to introduce a grotesque caricature of our Blessed Lady. Surely everyone knows that disrespect to the Mother of God outrages the feelings of all Catholics? That was what the American Catholics attacked, and it was foolish of them to allow the issue to be obscured by dragging in politics. I am not saying that Rossellini intended to attack Mary, but he should have known that the general run of audiences sees not the artist's intention, but only what actually appears on the screen. And what appeared on the screen in this film was a degradation of womanhood proclaiming a virgin birth. Are you satisfied, Sir, that this is so far removed from blasphemy as to be unimportant? I am not.

Yours faithfully,

(Miss) E. D. TURBIN.

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(UNFAIR TO EISENSTEIN, continued from page 55)

5. Mr. McLeod places the word "innovation" in inverted commas, thereby suggesting that I used it in the context he quotes. I did not. Nor did I praise the documentary "which makes the commentary carry the message". I described it as "little more than an illustrated lecture", which would be scant praise indeed. Mr. McLeod misunderstands entirely what I was saying when he implies that I found fruitful results of this technique in Jennings' work. I said: "the only consistent exception to this trend . . . have been the films of Humphrey Jennings". Thus although I think the quotation from Eisenstein (the one from page 111) is a very valuable one, it does not happen to apply to *Family Portrait*.

6. I would prefer to meet the point about Wyler on my home ground in *Sequence*, for it seems to me that Mr. McLeod has raised it quite irrelevantly. Again, he uses the dishonest device of inverted commas to imply that I described attempts at filmed theatre as "new". I did not. My point was that "the wee ifs" were met in *The Little Foxes*, and I stick to it.

7. No amount of Chinese quotation makes the reference to *Rope* relevant. I agree with what Mr. McLeod says about the film. Nor did I claim anywhere that Eisenstein's films had a monopoly of irrelevant conceits.

8. It is good to hear the "revisionism and diversionism appears in different shades and in various forms". I always had a sneaking suspicion that perhaps it was doing just that.

COMPETITION

Report on No. 12. Few entries were received for this (imaginary dialogues between actors and the characters they have played on the screen), and we regret to say that none of them seemed really worthy of a prize. Perhaps competitors found the subject too difficult, or perhaps it simply didn't interest them: at all events, it occurs to us we should initiate an extra competition to find out the kind of competition readers most enjoy.

Extra Competition. Ideas for a competition: readers are invited to send in ideas for a film competition. 10s. 6d. book token for each idea used. Closing date, July 1st.

Competition No. 14. Marooned on a desert island, there is nothing but a perfectly equipped cinema to distract and comfort you. What are the ten films you would most like to be (permanently) marooned with? 25s. and 10s. 6d. book token prizes for the two most appetising lists. Closing date, June 27th. All entries should have "Competition" marked on the envelope.

CORRECTION

In the last of Duncan Crow's articles on *The Protected Industry*, which appeared in the April *SIGHT AND SOUND*, the final sentence read, "A large gap still remains, and the recovery, by some means, of this lost £30,000,000 is the key to revival." This sentence should have read, "... the recovery, by some means, of a part of this lost £30,000,000 is the key to revival." We regret the omission of the words underlined, and the resulting misinterpretation of Mr. Crow's meaning.

SUMMER FILM SCHOOL

The British Film Institute's 8th Summer Film School will be held at University College of North Wales, Bangor, from August 7th to 21st, 1951. The Course covers the fundamentals of film technique and history and will include lectures by distinguished film makers and critics.

Excellent accommodation is provided at Reichel Hall. Inclusive fee for the fortnight's course, 13 guineas. Enrolment form can be obtained on request from the British Film Institute.



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